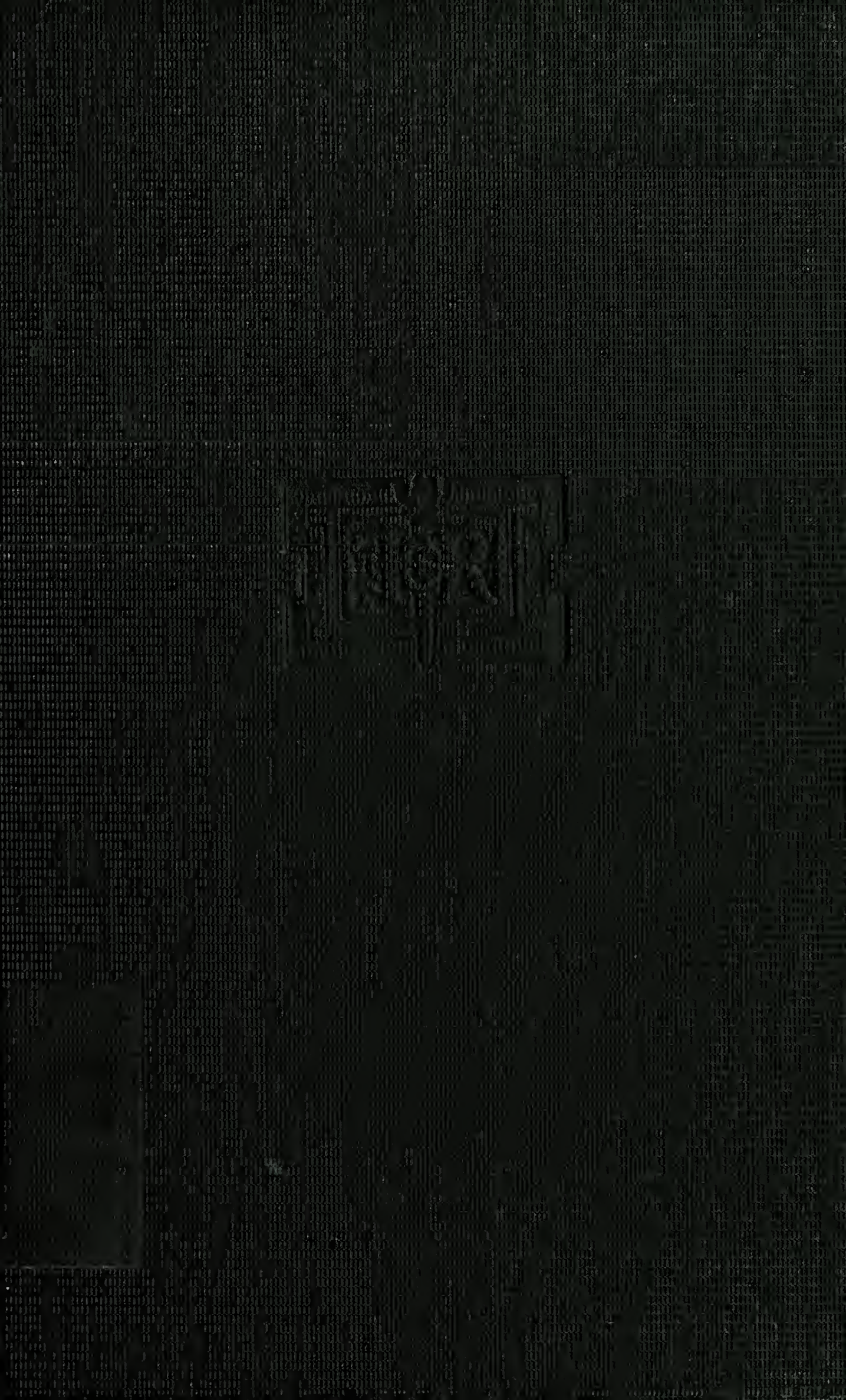

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By
LOUIS ALBERT BANKS
Author of "The New Ten Commandments," etc.

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To

My Sister

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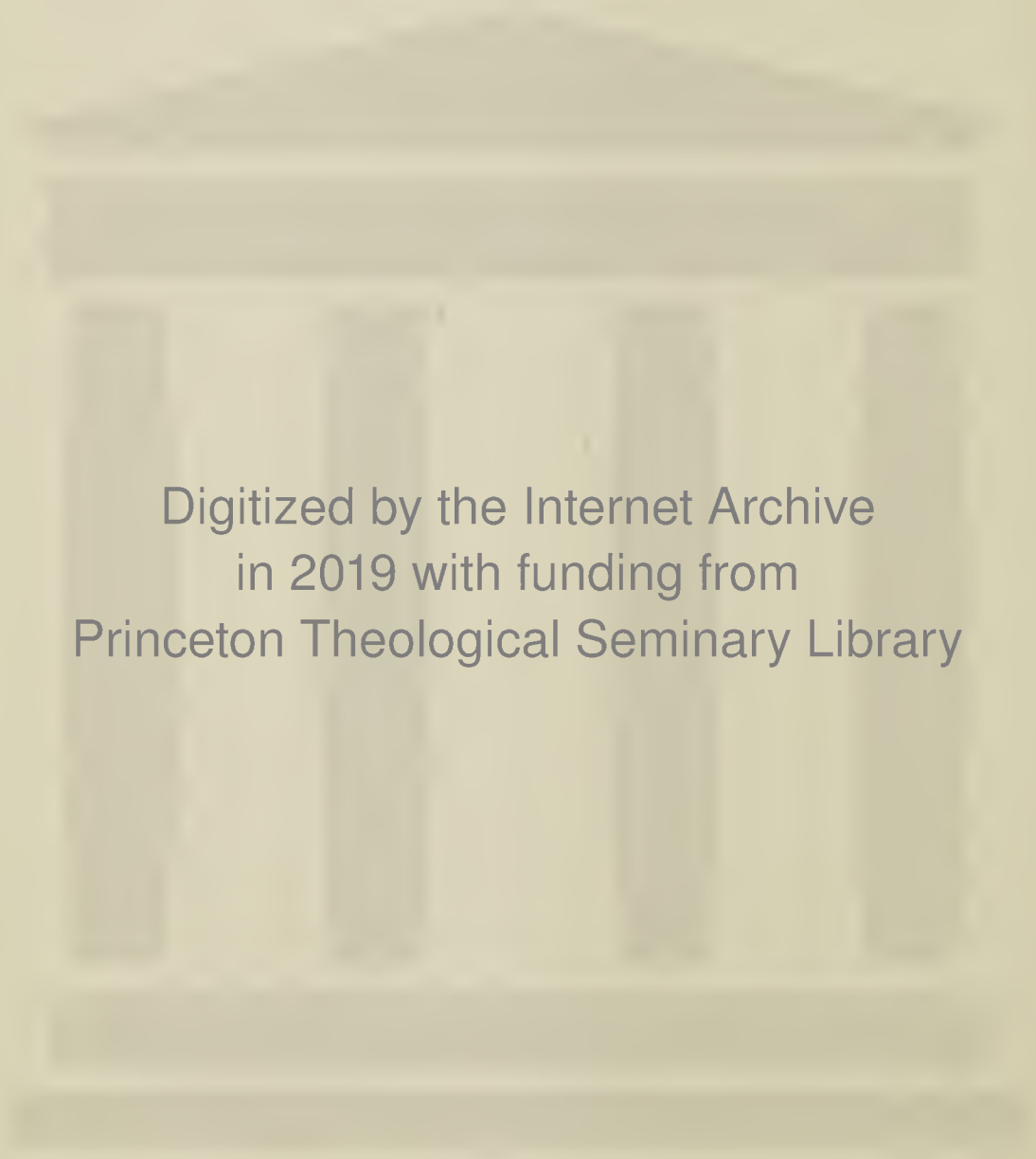

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Introduction

ISAIAH prophesied about Jesus that "His name shall be called Wonderful." And while there are many angles from which we might review the life and personality of Jesus in which He realizes and fulfills that prophecy, the most wonderful thing about Jesus is His power to forgive sins. That is the supreme wonder about Jesus. The men and women who came in contact with Him, and, meeting Him, lost their sins and became free from their gloom and burden and power, shine like stars along the trail which the Master made glorious by His divinely exercised power to bring men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God.

He loved to feed men's fainting bodies, but He loved most to feed their souls with the bread of life. He was glad when He could say to a loathsome leper: "Be thou clean!" but His greatest exultation was when He could cleanse the filthy soul. He lost no chance to open a blind man's eyes, but He was happier when He opened a darkened mind and filled a gloomy heart with the light from heaven. He was glad to give a palsied man

power to walk and carry his bed home on his shoulder, but His greatest rejoicing was when He could say to him: "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee."

That power to break the handcuffs and shackles of wicked habit and set free the slaves of sin is the supreme wonder about Christ. And, thank God, He is still the same wonderful Saviour.

It has been my blessed privilege to witness the exercise of this power of Christ to forgive sins and to save the sinner in many thousands of cases.

I well remember one watch-night service when the people gathered as early as eight o'clock, and for four hours, with prayer and song and grateful testimony to Christ's redeeming love, watched for the coming in of the New Year.

Rather early in the evening a very large, middle-aged man, evidently intoxicated, staggered into the church and sat down in the back seat and, after a while, fell asleep. He awoke in an hour or two, slowly coming out from the power of the drink. When at last I made an earnest appeal for sinners to accept Christ, he seemed much affected and sat sobbing and crying quietly. As the meeting continued, and earnest laymen were counselling and praying with others at the altar, I went back to interview this drunkard. He was a very repulsive spectacle. He had been down in the mud and

rolled in it until his ragged coat was plastered all over the back and sides; his trousers were torn open at both knees; his face was swollen, his nose and cheeks had the red lines of drunkenness, and his eyes were bloodshot. I sat down beside him and pleaded with him to give his heart to Christ and start the New Year with a new heart and a new life. He was sick enough of his sins, but was hopeless. The burden of his cry was: "What's the use? I cannot stop the drink. I tell you, Dominie, it's got me! It's got me!"

I never in my life saw a more unlikely case, yet I knew Christ had power to save him if I could waken a desire in his poor, hopeless, wicked heart to accept and surrender to Jesus. At last he seemed touched that I did not seem afraid or ashamed of putting my arm about his mud-soaked shoulders, and said that it was a shame to come into a decent church in such a condition. But I urged: "Man, your coat is clean compared with your soul! Your coat will brush off when it gets dry, but your soul is full of dirt and filth that only the blood of Jesus Christ can ever wash out—but He can make it white as snow."

At last the man roused enough to say, "You really talk like you believe that!"

"Oh, brother! I do believe it, I know it! Confess Jesus here and now and He will confess you

before God and forgive your sins and cleanse your heart and help you to be a good, sober, clean man!"

He stared into my eyes a moment, and then said: "What shall I do?"

It was the Philippian jailer's old question over again. I knew I had won.

"Do?" I exclaimed. "Come with me to the altar and give your heart to God through Jesus Christ!"

"What! Go up there among those well-dressed ladies looking like a hog?"

"Yes," I said. "They will be glad to have you come."

I broke in on whatever was doing at the front of the church with a shout: "Sing 'Just as I am!'" And they began to sing the grand old redemption hymn:

"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

I got the man to his feet. He was now sobbing like a child. With one arm about his muddy body I led him up to the altar, where he flung himself on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Christ met him right there in a wonderful sal-

vation. With great humility he begged for our consideration and our prayers. The next night he was back; but his face was clean and his torn clothes had been cleaned and patched. He got up when he had a chance and said: "Jesus Christ has wonderfully kept me from drink and all sin for one whole day!" The next night his testimony was for two days.

The third day he got work. He was an iron moulder and earned good wages. By the time he had twenty days to thank God for, he had a splendid new suit of clothes and every one remarked, "What a handsome man he is!" He hunted up his mother, rented a good home, placed her there as a queen, and no queen was ever prouder than she of her noble son now redeemed by the wonderful love and power of Christ. "His name shall be called Wonderful!"

Christ has that same wonderful power now. Some who see these words need it as much as did that drunken moulder. Oh, I know you would say indignantly: "I never drank a drop of liquor in my life; I have always been respectable!" No doubt. But there are other sins just as evil in the sight of God. What about envy? It was envy that drove Cain to murder his own brother. What about jealousy? It was jealousy that crucified Jesus—and Pilate knew it! What about greed,

the love of money, the determination to get rich at any cost? That was the sin that drove Judas to betray his Lord with a kiss.

Oh, man, woman, I do not know what your own peculiar sin is! but God knows what it is. And you know what is eating like a canker, like an evil worm, at the root of your tree of happiness. And whatever it is, it must be destroyed. You must be saved from it or be lost. You must be forgiven and taken from the power of your sin and set free. And, thank God, Jesus Christ can do that wonderful thing for you here and now. It is a wonderful thing to do! But that is His very name—"His name shall be called WONDERFUL!"

L. A. B.

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I

TAMING THE WILD MAN OF GADARA

"And no man had strength to tame him."
—MARK 5:4.

"Behold him that was possessed with demons sitting, clothed and in his right mind, even him that had the legion."—MARK 5:15.

IT was the morning after the storm on the lake that had so frightened the disciples when Jesus, aroused by them, had said to the angry waves: "Peace, be still," and the heaving billows had become calm. The disciples had been greatly awed and amazed at this exhibition of Christ's power, and it was perhaps partly to show them the far more important work Christianity must do that He brought them the next day to this country of the Gerasenes and landed at Gadara. Here it was that a man whom, for convenience' sake, we will call Demos, met them.

Demos was known as the Wild Man of Gadara. His mind and heart were the abode of unclean spirits which mastered him completely, so that he lived a wretched life, a curse to himself and a danger and a threat to others. With what graphic force Mark describes his condition:

"A man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling in the tombs: and no man could any more bind him, no, not with a chain; because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been rent asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: and no man had strength to tame him. And always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones."

This was the man who came running down to the beach to meet Jesus when He landed in company with His disciples. He did not come of his own accord. He was devil-driven, and the devils worshiped Christ, and Jesus commanded them to come out of the man. And the chief devil, who held Demos in torment, exclaimed: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, torment me not." And when Christ asked his name, he answered: "My name is Legion, for we are many." And then he asked for Christ's permission to take possession of a herd of two thousand hogs near by; and for some reason which Christ deemed wise, He gave them permission, and they entered into the swine, and the animals rushed into the sea and were drowned, and their herders, alarmed and excited, ran away to find the men who owned the hogs.

Now, while all this was going on, Demos, rescued from the evil spirits and realizing his condi-

tion, had gone and secured proper clothes, and by the time the hog-raisers came to see what had become of their herds, they found Demos, the wild man, wild no longer, but sitting with Jesus and His disciples, clothed and in his right mind. But all this was of no account to the hog-raisers. They were not interested in men; all their interests were in hogs. So they begged Christ to depart out of their coasts. We may well believe they were pretty badly scared or they would have come with stones and spears.

It reminds one of the old days when we were fighting the foul liquor saloons that filled so many men—and women, too—with unclean spirits; when there was nothing the saloon owners dreaded so much as a Christian church—and well they feared the Church, for it was the team-work of the Christian churches that finally drove the saloons like the swine of Gadara into the sea, and, please God, bootleggers' dens will soon go the same way.

After a little, when Jesus and His disciples were preparing to depart, Demos became very anxious and begged Jesus that he might be permitted to go with Him. But Christ saw that it was better for him to go back to his home, and said: "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee."

No doubt Demos watched from the landing, with eyes wet with tears, as long as he could keep them in view, waving his hand ever and again in grateful love to the wonderful Saviour who had set him free from the wretched uncleanness of soul which had wrecked and despoiled his life. And then, with a deep sigh, he turned his face toward home.

Now, with our knowledge of life and human nature, it is not hard for our imagination to reproduce the story of Demos. It is not at all an uncommon story in its great essential fundamentals.

Demos was a bright boy, born far back in the land of the Gerasenes, who had the great misfortune to be born into a family of easy-going parents who allowed him to grow up without learning the important lesson of obedience. He had inherited a quick temper that was like a powder flash; and when he was a little boy it was counted great sport in the family to stir up Demos, as one would a pet tiger cub, and see him spit out his baby anger.

It was not such good sport when he got older; but it was easier then to pet him and smooth his fur the right way than to enforce obedience on a spoiled boy. And so he grew to manhood with no law but his wild, ungoverned temper. There were days when he was a delightful companion,

when everything went to please him; and others when hell seemed to be let loose, when he was crossed. He is not an uncommon type.

Demos won the love of a good girl and started his home; and then every little while the fur began to fly. There is no place where self-control and patience are more in demand than in marriage. It is no place for lawlessness, and Demos was lawless. His wife loved him devotedly at first, and bore much in silent suffering, and then in self-defense came back in protest. Demos chafed under restraint. As he grew older, and as the burdens of life increased, he grew worse every day. Instead of a flash of lightning, followed by smiles, the flash of temper began to be followed by sullenness. He became a man with a grouch, and after a while the grouch came to stay.

He was like Cain: At first he was only envious of Abel now and then, and between times loved him as when they were boyish playfellows. But after a while he began to hate Abel, and then the hate settled down into sullenness. Cain's countenance changed. He lost the way to laughter-town. God saw it and knew his danger and reasoned with him and warned him. In substance, God said: "Look out, Cain, there is danger in that envy and hate; it is like a wild beast crouching at the door." But Cain went on hating, and one day in the

field, when he met his brother, that seething hell of hate in his heart burst forth, and he killed Abel, and became a vagabond on the face of the earth.

Beware of allowing your evil temper to have sway. Men and women ought to learn this lesson in childhood. Family government ought to teach children God's government. The decay of family government is, to my mind, one of the most serious and dangerous signs of the times in all the world of our day. If boys and girls do not learn to obey while they are children, they will certainly chafe under discipline and law in later life. Children who grow up where the Bible, out of which lessons of love and spiritual illumination are drawn daily at the family altar, lies side by side with the rod of discipline as a symbol of government and obedience, grow up not only to love and reverence their parents, but to be law-abiding citizens; the soldiers of the common good, who can be relied upon to sustain the free institutions of the Republic. If we are to turn back the deadly tide of bolshevism and anarchy threatening the world to-day, we must bring back the family altar with its family worship, and the loving but firm Christian government of children that will teach them that obedience to law is liberty.

Demos never learned that lesson of self-control, and first the hot, stinging lash of his tongue, when

in temper; and later the still more brutal and bitter sullenness, which is temper after it is ripe, broke his wife's heart and made him a source of dread and fear to his children. And so, step by step, Demos took his dark trail to the day when the grouch never left his brow, and the devils were in complete control.

You remember how Robert Louis Stevenson, in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," tells a parallel story to that of Demos. Dr. Jekyll has discovered a drug which will transform him into Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll, the kind-hearted, gracious-minded, genial-souled physician, under the influence of that drug becomes the mean, ugly, dwarfed Mr. Hyde, a creature controlled by murderous hates and vicious passions.

The great mistake Dr. Jekyll made was the belief that he could pass back from Hyde to Jekyll at will. As he went on, he lost that power, and found himself slipping into the devilish Hyde unawares, and then, after a while, Hyde comes to stay and his nobler self is lost entirely.

So Demos came at last to be an outlaw who wandered far from home, an outcast in the tombs and in the mountains, a curse to himself and to every one who knew him.

And then he meets Jesus on the beach of Gadara. The devils are cast out. His unclean

soul is set free. His evil tempers are mastered by divine love. And the master who has redeemed him and set him free says: "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee."

Now the wonderful Saviour has gone, and the test of his salvation has come. He starts home. He had intended to go clear home before he said a word to any one about what had happened; but as he goes he recalls what a wonderful change has come over his life, and he gets so happy he cannot keep still: "Thank God! Dear Jesus, how good He was to me!" And just then he meets a man and tells him the whole story, and after that he goes on telling every one he meets until the story runs everywhere through the whole countryside.

Now you will note that Christ's command was, "Tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee;" but Demos went on his way shouting how great things Jesus had done for him. Jesus was all the Lord Demos knew; and wiser than he knew, he went on giving glory to Christ for his salvation.

Good news, like bad news, scatters fast and everywhere from town to town, and from house to house went the wonderful story that Demos, the wild man of Gadara, had met Jesus and had

lost his devils, and was wild no more, but was full of wonderful joy and happiness, and never lost a chance to tell what glorious things Jesus had done for him. So it was that the news of his salvation reached home ahead of him.

At first his poor wife, who had suffered so much at his hands, could not believe it. "I hope he does not come here! I used to love him. My! how I did love him! God only knows how I loved him! But he treated me so badly; I have suffered so much from his vile temper, and he has been so mean and wicked, not only to me but to the children, that I never want to see him again."

But the news kept coming. One after another came and said, "Mary, a wonderful change has come over Demos. He's not the same man. You know how sullen and bitter he was. Now his face is full of smiles, and when he tells about meeting Jesus and losing all his evil spirits, he laughs aloud and happy tears fill his eyes and wet his cheeks."

"What! Demos laughs? Why, he never laughed once for a year before he left! That is as he used to be before we were married, and at times afterward. Oh, if it could be! If it could be that he has been set free from those wicked tempers! But it's too good to be true!"

And then, at last, a neighbour boy comes running and shouts to her: "Demos is in town;

yonder they come down the street. The people are leaving their stores, and their homes, and are bringing him home. Why, he's the happiest man you ever saw!"

That was too much. Mary could not resist that. How often she had tried to make him happy, and failed. She had cooked dainties for him, and done everything in her power to please him and make him happy, but months had gone by and she would not see him happy a single time. Something wonderful had surely happened if Demos was happy. She must see him. She could stand it no longer, and with one hand holding her little girl and the other clutching her boy, they went out to meet that strange procession. As she reached the gate she saw him coming with the crowd of neighbours. Just then he saw her, and, somehow, the old love came back to him, that years of quarreling and sinful tempers had dulled and blurred. She was his precious Mary again—the girl who had seemed to him the fairest and sweetest of all God's bright creation in womanhood—and his heart broke at the memory of how he had treated her; the way he had broken her heart and filled her life with sorrow. But, as he was about to halt with shame and despair, he remembered Jesus and what He had done for him, and all else was forgotten. He threw his arms aloft and

shouted as he ran toward her, "Mary! See what Jesus did for me! I am well again! The unclean spirits are gone! And, O Mary! I never loved you so much in all my life as I do to-day! And with Jesus' help I am going to be a good husband and a good father! Forgive me, Mary!"

By that time he had reached Mary. They had found each other's arms, and eyes and lips were settling difficulties and estrangement faster and more completely than any words could have done. The children followed her to their father's arms. The neighbours, conscious that they were looking on holy things, silently dispersed, and a Christian family life began.

Thank God! Jesus is still performing miracles just as wonderful as that, in all parts of the world wherever His Gospel is being proclaimed. Men and women gone wild with wicked tempers and passions are being tamed as only Jesus has the strength to tame them. Hearts and minds that have become filthy dens of unclean spirits are being cleansed at the word of Christ to-day as in the day when He landed at Gadara, and families torn asunder are being reconciled by His divine love; and Christian homes are being established through the conversion of husbands and wives.

Demos had just one chance. He had only one

glimpse of Jesus, but that was enough to win salvation.

Christ has landed on your coast. His heart is full of love. His hands are full of blessings. Will you take them? No matter what your sin may be, no matter what particular phase of uncleanness has soiled your soul, Jesus has power to cleanse and redeem you, and He can do it now. Whatever unhappiness or gloom or defeat sin has brought to your life, Christ has power to dispel it. Christ can bring joy and laughter and contentment, and fill the future with abiding hope.

II

THE WOMAN WHO FORGOT HER WATER-POT

"So the woman left her water-pot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?"—JOHN 4:28–29.

IT was at the close of a hard day when Jesus and His disciples came to the well of Sychar. The Master was weary and remarked to His friends that if they only had food it would be a pleasant place to camp. And they, sensitive to every desire of their wonderful Leader, begged Him to remain while they went into the town to buy food. And so Jesus sat down by the well to rest while He waited for their return.

This was a famous well, which had been dug by Jacob and his sons long ago, and in that primitive day long before the wonderful inventions and coöperation of our modern communities, where water is brought to the humblest tenement in the town or city. It was carried, usually on the shoulder or on the heads of women, to the hilltop, where towns were built, because they could be more easily defended.

What wonders Jesus has wrought for womanhood! You can trace back to Jesus Christ and His life and teaching the comradeship and respect, an even-handed chance for education, and a fair share in the blessings of life granted to women in most civilized lands to-day.

Sychar was built on a hill, and the women carried the water for home and household needs as their mothers and grandmothers had done before them. It did not occur to the men that the stronger shoulder should carry the heavier burden. That thought had to come through Christ's Gospel that the strong should bear the burdens of the weak. Every woman should love and honour Jesus Christ. I marvel when I see an intelligent woman who does not revere Jesus.

While Jesus sat resting by the well of Jacob, a woman came down from the top of the hill with her great rawhide water-pot for water for her house. She was not a woman of high standing in Sychar. That she was an attractive woman we are sure, since five different men had taken her to wife. But life had not gone well with her, and she had lost rather than gained in womanly dignity, until at last she had weakly given herself to an unblessed fellowship with a man, which is looked at askance in every land, and which marked her as a woman off-colour in the community. As she drew

near the old well she looked with interest at the tired man, and responded with sympathy when He asked her for a drink of water from her water-pot. She gave it to Him willingly, but expressed her astonishment that He, being a Jew, should humble Himself to ask a favour of her, seeing that she was a Samaritan woman; for it was at a time when the Jews and Samaritans were not friendly and were not accustomed to deal in a neighbourly manner with each other.

To this Jesus answered: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

The woman is full of interest now, and says: "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus replied: "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." The woman evidently grasped something of the wonderful claim made by Christ, and she responded very simply and directly: "Sir, give me this water, that

I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw."

Then it was that the real conversational wrestling match between Jesus and the woman of Sychar began, the prize being the woman's soul. Suddenly changing the subject entirely to outward seeming, yet really continuing it straight as a die, Jesus said: "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." In substance Jesus was saying: "If I am to give you the water of eternal life, we must first straighten out your social life; the people you live with will have something to do about that. The spiritual water that will slake the thirst of your soul and become a fountain of contentment and joy within you can come to you only when your life is clean and pure, and your relations are true and right in the sight of God." So when Jesus said: "Go, call thy husband," it was like a surgeon's knife thrust into the heart of a carbuncle. The woman started in amazement: "I have no husband."

Then Jesus looked her calmly in the face and said, not accusingly, but facing the ugly facts of her life: "Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly."

The woman answered: "Sir, I perceive that

thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." But Jesus is determined to bring her face to face with the chance of immediate salvation, and so He answered: "Woman, believe me, . . . the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman responds to this with true solemnity and, showing that she had had careful religious training in her youth, says, "I know that Messiah cometh (he that is called Christ): when he is come, he will declare unto us all things."

At last the moment of revelation has come: Jesus frankly says to her, "I that speak unto thee am he."

Just then, at that critical moment, came the disciples, and as Jesus turned to greet them the woman, in her excitement at His wonderful declaration of Himself and His mission forgetting all about her water-pot and the water she had come for, hurried away into the city, feeling that she must share with some one else the great news that like a glorious sunrise of hope was illuminating her own soul.

The disciples were, no doubt, full of wonder at finding their Master in such intimate conversation with the woman; but they spread the evening meal and urged Jesus to draw near and eat with them. To their astonishment, Jesus was not hungry. They had left Him not only tired, but hungry; but now His hunger was gone. "Who has given him food?" they say one to another, and Jesus, perceiving their wonder, roused Himself from His reverie and said: "I have meat to eat that ye know not. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work." And, looking away across the fields where the rapidly sinking sun shone brightly on their white clothing, Jesus called the attention of His disciples to a large group of people coming toward them, and said: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest. He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. For herein is the saying true, One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not laboured: others have laboured, and ye are entered into their labour."

Now this is what had happened: The excited

and aroused woman who had come to believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, as a result of her conversation with Him, had left her water-pot at the well and had run into the city and had cried right and left to every acquaintance she met: "A wonderful man has come to Sychar! I left him at the well of Jacob but just now! Come and see him, he is wonderful, he reads one's very soul, he told me all the secrets of my life, he uncovered my secret soul to me. Come! This must be the Christ. Come with me and see him!" And a great group soon gathered and, fearing the wonderful visitor may leave and pass on to some other town, they follow the woman rapidly as she leads them down the slope of the hill toward the well where Jesus still lingers with His disciples.

There are some very interesting things in this story—interesting especially to every one who would learn the glorious art of winning souls to Christ. The first of these in importance is that this is the great, supreme soul food to the Christian. Jesus declared to His disciples that His supreme food was to do the will of God in relation to men and women. He had been very tired and very hungry until the woman came down from Sychar to the well and He had the opportunity

to be a help and a blessing to her; and in that service weariness and hunger dropped away from Him; He was fed and rested by that divine service.

It is a great test for ourselves as Christians. To be a Christian is to be like Jesus. If we are to be strong to do Christlike deeds, we must eat of the food that made Him strong. The table of human needs, of human sorrow and sin, is spread all about us; if we are quick to respond to our opportunities, as was Jesus, we may feed and strengthen on the spiritual food which satisfied His soul. We can only be spiritually strong and glad by the service of our fellow men in the love and self-forgetfulness which rested and refreshed our Lord.

The forgetfulness of this new convert to Christ, that sent her running up the hill into the town, leaving her water-pot at the well, is suggestive of a great truth: that spiritual matters are of supreme importance and that one's power to convince and bless others concerning any spiritual revelation or blessing he has received, depends on his being so absorbed with it that all the ordinary affairs of life become secondary and incidental to the great thing, the fact of the divine Christ, His power and willingness to forgive sins and save our souls alive. When this woman came back from her

conversation with Jesus, if she had brought her water-pot as full as usual, and had spoken in measured accents, she would have attracted little or no attention. The very fact that she was so excited that she had forgotten the water she went for, and came running and hailed every one she met with her excited story, made every listener feel that something very unusual and important had happened to her, and that it was worth investigating. Her very earnestness aroused them out of their indifference to spiritual things and broke through the hard shell of their absorption in worldly affairs. My friends, if we are to capture a busy, absorbed world for our Christ, we, too, must account Jesus to be the most interesting and important personality we know about, and deem the news that Christ is in our town with power to forgive men and women their sins and feed their souls with food from heaven and slake their thirst with the water of eternal life to be of first importance. If we really feel the vast and immediate importance of this news, we, too, will forget the ordinary affairs of the day in view of the nearness of Christ, who is able to save unto the uttermost every one who will come unto God by Him.

We have also suggested on the highest authority

known to man that the richest harvest field of human endeavour is to win men and women to know and love and trust Christ as their Saviour. It is a great thing to heal and comfort the body, but infinitely greater to heal or bless the soul. The body will live for a few years, but the soul will live forever.

The soul is the source of courage, hope, contentment, peace, and no one can so bless the soul and make it the fountain of all these precious things as Jesus Christ. When you bring and introduce a man or a woman or a boy or a girl to Jesus, and insure a friendship with Him, you have started a train of pure and joyous life, the widespread blessing of which only God can tell. St. James says, speaking of one who causes a conversion: "Let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

But he who wins a soul away from sin to Christ not only does all that—not only prevents sin, and saves from sorrow and death—but he starts a career of hope and courage and love and purity that shall go on filling the world with light and joy through countless ages. Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus; and all the marvelous glory of Pentecost with thousands of joyous conversions

was in that deed. A humble believer brought John B. Gough to Jesus; and not only stopped one drunkard from the downward path, but started a current of sobriety and revolt against the saloon that is yet being felt for righteousness to the ends of the earth. The preacher who won Dwight L. Moody, the shoe clerk, to Jesus little dreamed of the stream of divine blessing he had started on its way that day. The humble missionary who won a wicked baseball player to his Lord had no vision of the host that Billy Sunday would turn to righteousness. My friends, there is no gold mine with such infinite possibilities of unsearchable wealth as this! South Africa has no diamond field that promises such a chance for lasting riches as is within our reach in our opportunity to win jewels for Christ's crown.

It is clearly revealed here that it is personal effort which wins in saving souls. This woman's cry was, "Come, see a man who told *me*," "Come, see a man who told *me my* sins. Come, see a man who told me all the evil things *I* did." There was nothing vague about that cry. It was personal and definite. She was not arguing about something that was merely speculation; she was telling about things she knew. You may not be able to argue about Christ and His atonement in a way

to convince others; but if you have yourself met Jesus face to face, and talked with Him, and He has uncovered your sins to you, and shown you the way of escape from them, you have some news to tell that men will be attracted to hear. It is the personal note, the personal touch, that tells. How well Paul knew that! Wherever he was he felt that his own personal experience with Christ was his most powerful message. Paul was a well-trained lawyer and knew how to argue with the best disputants of his day; but when he was brought before kings and was called on for the best that was in him, he always told his own personal experience—how he met Jesus in the way and lost his sins at His feet.

Do not hide your own personal light, which God has given to you, under a bushel. Neither your talents, nor your scholarship, nor your wealth, nor anything else can take the place of the simple story of your personal experience with Jesus in winning others away from their sins to Christ. Don't be too proud or too conservative or too bashful to tell that story. Your silence may do infinite harm. Gratitude to God and to your Saviour should cause you gladly to tell the story of Christ's forgiveness of your sins and the blessings that have come to you. The desire to bless your fellow men should make you doubly willing

to bear glad testimony to your own conversion. A sense of honour and fidelity to your own soul should make you faithful to bear witness to the truth of your personal experience with Christ. More people are won to Christ and become Christians through the testimony of some other saved man or woman than in any other way. John, in recording this story of the great revival that came to Sychar, says: "And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all things that ever I did. So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

At first glance this sounds as though they were speaking rudely or slightingly to the woman. But nothing of that kind is to be inferred. They are only saying: "At first we came to Christ because of what you said, of your experience with Christ; but we no longer have to rely on that, for we have given our own hearts to Him, and He has given us an experience in our own souls which makes us known from the witness in our own consciences

that He is the Saviour of the world, because He has become our Saviour."

Thank God, every one we bring to Jesus can have that personal experience. The acid test of Christianity for every one of us must be what it can do and what it has done and does do for us in our own lives. This woman was off-colour socially and morally in Sychar, but Jesus brought back the glow of goodness and moral health to her life. Everywhere where the name of Jesus is preached to-day, He is doing that same glorious work. Men as wild as the man of Gadara become sweet-tempered and full of reason and peace. Women as notorious in sin as the woman of Sychar become examples of purity and noble womanhood in association with Jesus. In His name every sin may be overthrown and every sinner converted and saved. None need hold back for fear his sin is too great; He is able to save unto the uttermost limit every one that will come unto God in His blessed name!

III

THE SINNER WHO CAME TO JESUS THROUGH THE ROOF

"But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth before them all; in so much that they were all amazed, and glorified God."—MARK 2: 10–12.

JOHN HOPELESS had been sick with the palsy a long time. He lived in Palestine—a land we have learned to call the Holy Land because Jesus lived there; gave Himself for the sins of the world there, and arose from the dead and ascended into heaven from that land. It was Jesus who made it the Holy Land. But John Hopeless had never heard of Jesus and had given up hope of ever being cured of the dreadful palsy that bound him to his bed by its cruel chains. And then a wonderful thing happened. His next neighbour down the road was nearly as bad off as John was. He had been a cripple for more years than John had suffered with the palsy; yes, James Cheero had been crippled so that he could not walk

at all save by the aid of a pair of clumsy crutches. But he had always been cheerful and had never given up hope of getting the use of his legs again, though no one else saw any reason for his hope.

And one day Cheero came dashing into the house of his neighbour Hopeless and shouted, almost out of breath: "Cheer up, John, you are going to be well yet!"

And when he paused to catch his breath, Hopeless, in astonishment, cried: "Why, James, where are your crutches?"

"Why, I don't need them any more! I met the most wonderful Man in the world an hour ago, and He put His hands on my legs and said, 'Be thou whole,' and I felt a strange thrill run through my legs, and I dropped my crutches and walked; and then I was so happy that I leaped, and ran, and shouted for joy!"

By this time John Hopeless' eyes were standing out in amazement, and for a moment a look of hope sprang up in them; but merely for a moment, then he lay back with a weary sigh: "That shows how much worse off I am than you were. You could get around on crutches, but I have not been away from this place for years, and never will go until they bury me."

"Oh, don't say that, John, for this wonderful rabbi, Jesus, has stopped just up the road where

an old woman was very bad with a fever, and He went in to heal her, and they are bringing people with all kinds of sickness so fast that He is still in the house, and He heals every one that comes."

"But, James, you did not see Him heal any one who was sick with palsy, did you?"

"No, John; but I saw Him make a leper look as fresh and clean as a boy by a word and a touch of His hand, and the old blind beggar that used to sit by the roadside can see now as well as you can; and if He can make a blind man see, and a leper clean, He surely can cure a man of palsy."

"But, James, see; it's just my luck: these people met Him face to face or they never would have been healed; but I cannot get to Him. I am chained here to this bed."

"Well, don't fret about that," said Cheero. "We are going to take you, bed and all."

"But, James, I am too heavy; you know I cannot help myself the least bit."

"All we ask you to do is to cheer up." And Cheero went to the door and cried: "Come on, boys," and in a moment in burst the man who for years had sat beside the road, blind and begging, his eyes flashing with interest and his face flushed with joy, crying, "Cheer up, Hopeless; see what Jesus has done for me: two hours ago I was blind as a bat, and now I can see as well as any one.

Jesus did it, and He will cure you, too." Then another man stepped alongside: "And I was a poor homeless leper. My soul! what an awful life I have led, but I met Jesus and He made me clean. See! my flesh is as soft and fresh as any man's; He will heal you, too."

"But it will take four to carry this bed, and you are only three."

But Cheero said, "I stopped at your brother's and asked him to help, and he said he would follow us, and here he is. Now, boys," said Cheero, "each man take a corner and we will soon have him at the feet of Jesus."

He was a large man and not easy to carry, but the four men, one at each corner of the bed, lifted him from the floor and soon had him on his way. But when they came in sight of the house, they saw a great crowd gathered about the door and a great many other poor sick people lying on the ground outside, waiting, with their friends, greatly excited because every few minutes some one slipped out through the crowd whom Jesus had but just now healed. This was so exciting to those outside, waiting, that they crowded as close as possible to the door, and it was soon evident that the house was full inside, and only as the healed people came out was there any chance for another inside.

Poor John Hopeless! His courage, which had begun to grow, failed him again. "That's just my luck; we can never get in to Jesus through that crowd, and He will get weary of healing and go away before my turn comes."

Just then James Cheero had a new idea. "Say, boys, I'll tell you what we can do: that flat roof is in sections. We will manage some way to get Hopeless up on that roof and open it up, and let him right down before Jesus."

Then spoke up the brother of Hopeless: "I know where there is a ladder. I'll get it." And away he ran.

"And I know where there is an old tent that is big enough to slip right under this bed, and we can, by holding on to the four corners, which will serve instead of ropes, let the bed down to the floor," said Cheero, and away he ran as if he had been a contestant in a foot race.

"My, when I remember how James Cheero used to hobble around on crutches and now see him run like that, it almost makes me hope I shall be able to walk again, myself," said Hopeless.

"Of course you will," said the man whose sight had been restored. "Why, John, it would be no more wonderful for you to carry this bed home on your own back than for me to be standing here, seeing."

"Or me to be standing here, a clean, well man," exclaimed the former leper.

But now the brother came with the ladder, and Cheero came with the tent, and they carried the bed near the wall of the house; two of them climbed to the roof and took hold of the corners on one side, and in one way and another they finally managed to lift their cumbersome human burden to the roof. It was a simple matter, then, to take out a section.

I imagine there was a good deal of excitement underneath when the roof opened over their heads, and they saw the men peering down to make sure just where Jesus was. But they were still more excited when the bed started down and seemed to be coming on to their heads, and, in self-defense, they crowded back against each other. Holding the four corners of the tent, the four determined men let Hopeless down at the feet of Jesus in the opening the fearful people in front of the Master had cleared.

Bring the picture before your imagination. The central figure is Jesus. There He stands, His face full of power and compassion. His eyes are full of tenderness and sympathy. At His feet, lying on his bed, is poor John Hopeless, still trembling with his old enemy, the palsy. He is looking at Jesus. He had never seen a rabbi like this. There

was a nobility about the face of Jesus and a look in His eyes that thrilled him through with hope. It did more than make him hope for healing. It made him feel what a poor, miserable sinner he had been, and was. Down in his heart he felt the divine goodness in the soul of Jesus, and he said to himself: "If I could only be free from my sins against God and be as good as He is, it would be a greater blessing than even to be well again." About these central figures stood the crowd. Some were cold, sneering Pharisees watching to catch Jesus in a trap, to find some slip in His words whereby they could get Him into trouble; others happily healed and full of reverent gladness, and still others just crowding through the door, seeking help: all looking eagerly to see what Jesus would do.

Jesus is not looking at the man on his bed, but His face is lifted to the open roof, where at the four corners of the square opening are the eager faces of the men who have just let the palsied man down at the Master's feet. From the faces of three of them, at least, the most intent and joyous faith shines forth. Has not Jesus, within a few hours, healed them? One had been a poor, blind man for years. Now his glad eyes are drinking in the goodness and mercy in the face of the Lord. One had been a poor outcast leper, but now outcast

no more, his flesh soft as a child's, his beaming countenance showing he has not a doubt of Christ's power to heal; and Cheero, the man of the crutches, lame no longer, his face radiant with courage that his friend and neighbour is about to be cured.

Jesus feels their faith, and dropping His eyes to the face of the sick man, says: "Son, thy sins are forgiven." Strange, was it not? John Hopeless had just been thinking how glorious it would be to be sinless like Jesus, and now the first words Jesus says are, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

But this is just what the Pharisees are watching for, and they nod their heads and wink at each other as much as to say, "We have got Him now. That is a claim to divinity; for no one can forgive sins but God." And Jesus, knowing perfectly what was in their wicked thoughts, went on saying, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the sick of palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?"

And John Hopeless, hopeless no more forever, felt thrilling through and through him not only the new physical strength he had not known for years, but a new sense of joy of soul, a rapture from forgiven sin. He was not only a well man, but he was a free man, a good man, he had peace

with God, and in that happiest hour he had ever known, he arose and took his own bed over his shoulders, and as they crowded back before him in awe and wonder, he made his way through the crowd on his way home.

Thank God, Jesus still has power on earth to forgive sins!

Let us not fail to learn the special message of this particular conversion—the wonderful lesson of the effective power of coöperation in bringing people to Christ for their salvation. Only Jesus could forgive his sins and heal his sickness, but the four friends brought him where Christ was and secured his salvation.

Christ saved Andrew and his friends, but it was John the Baptist who said to them: "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Jesus saved them, but John sent them. Jesus saved Peter; but it was Andrew who went and found and brought his brother to Jesus. We may still bring our friends to Jesus for Him to save.

But let us not stray away from the four men in this story. Is there some one who needs Jesus very much whom you are desirous should be saved? You have been praying for that one friend or acquaintance especially. Well, how about it? Are you willing to be one of the four to bring

him quickly to the Saviour? God likes to have us answer our own prayers. Fred Douglass says he prayed to God to set him free from slavery for a long time; but when he actually began to run toward freedom, he got farther away from bondage on his own legs in one minute than he had in a year of praying. We must answer our own prayers when we can. If you are willing to be one, where are you going to look for the other three? It is well to look close to the man's home for one or more of them. A father, or mother, or brother, or sister, if they are Christians, will be good helpers. Interest them to help now. If a man is married, and his wife is a genuine Christian, no one will be better for one corner. If you still need another, get a new convert, get some man or woman who has recently been healed, who has found Christ in his own salvation. You will not have to argue with them that Christ has power to forgive sins; they know it by the joy of their own souls. No one will lift harder to help against all odds to carry a helpless sinner to the feet of Jesus than a new convert who is all aglow with the new freedom in his own heart.

Oh! Christ is in the midst, able to save and willing to save. My friend! You who are conscious of your sin, and of your own weakness to overcome it, if you will look in the face of Jesus

as eagerly as John Hopeless did, you will not only find the forgiveness of your sins, but you will receive a new consciousness of God-given power to live a new life and a good life, and you will have thrilling you through and through the noble assurance that your manhood is at last fulfilled in Jesus.

Patrick O'Shea has written a very beautiful little poem of love which I like to spiritualize and use as an expression of my own heart's experience with Jesus, my Lord:

When I found you—all nature seemed to call;
The silence of the years that crept along
Now burst into a madding lyric song,
The very skies took on a different hue
When I found you.

A little rill that lay within my heart,
All frozen over with the pain of years,
Broke from its dam, and like refreshing tears
Swept through my being—bringing hope anew
When I found you.

The Pagan "I" now stole away in shame,
The angels seemed to peep from every space
And all the sunbeams mirrored your dear face.
At last I knew that God sent rain and dew,
When I found you.

And so you brought unto my darkened soul
A wondrous light—a knowledge of great things;
Then all the evil spirits took to wings
And I at last to my own self was true,
When I found you.

It may be like that to you if you will find Jesus and let Him find you. All nature and all life will grow radiant, and new impulse and joy will spring up at His magic touch. All the universe will pulsate with the presence of the living, loving God. The evil spirits that have tempted you will take wing, and to your own best self you will be true if you will find Jesus, your Saviour and your Lord.

IV

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW LEVI

"And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the place of toll, and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him."
—MARK 2: 14.

"And Levi made him a great feast in his house: and there was a great multitude of publicans and of others that were sitting at meat with them."
—LUKE 5: 29.

"And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."—MATTHEW 9: 9.

MATTHEW and Levi are the same man. It was not an unusual thing in the early days of Christianity for a man who had been well known under another name, on becoming a disciple of Christ, to change his name. Thus Simon became Peter, and Saul of Tarsus, the violent persecutor, after conversion became Paul, the evangelist and missionary. So Levi, when he shed the old disgraced life of Roman tax-collector, changed his name to Matthew, the gift of God.

It is very probable that Matthew was a cousin to Jesus, and, if so, had known Jesus all his life.

Matthew was the black sheep in his family. He had taken office under the hated Roman government and had become that most despised of all officers, a tax-gatherer. No one ever likes to pay taxes, and the most hateful of all taxes are those a subject people have to pay to foreign despots.

It was especially galling for the Jews to pay taxes to the Roman tax-collectors, and when one of their own people so forgot his racial and family honour as to become the customs officer of this hated Roman government, he was looked upon as a renegade and a traitor. He became largely an outcast from society. They would not even accept his evidence in a court of justice. This hatred was carried so far, and this ostracism was so bitter, that it grew to be a proverb, if you wished to describe some one entirely outside the pale of possible fellowship, "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Levi was a publican—no wonder that, when he gave up his office and his despicable business to follow Christ as His disciple, he threw away the old name and became Matthew, the gift of God.

It is quite likely that Jesus was the only one in the family who had not cast Matthew off. But you cannot imagine Jesus refusing to speak to His cousin because he earned his living differently from the rest of the family, and Jesus longed to win

Matthew to His service, to be a preacher of the good news of salvation. So one day, as He was passing by his place of business at the Custom House, He went in and had a frank personal talk with Matthew and offered to take him as one of His special disciples.

Matthew seems to have yielded at once to Christ's invitation. He had no doubt kept track of the growing fame of Jesus. It is quite likely that the conversion of the man who was let down through the roof had had a good deal to do with Matthew's decision that Jesus was the Christ. Great stress had been laid on the forgiveness of sins in that case of healing, which had probably taken place not far from Matthew's place of business. In any event, he had come to believe on Jesus and probably had wished that he might become one of His disciples, and was ready with quick response when Jesus came and invited him to follow Him.

He did not dally. His resignation went in at once. I can imagine how he went home and said: "Mary, I have wonderful news for you!"

"Why, what has happened?"

"I had a call from Jesus to-day."

"You did! What did He want?"

"He invited me to give up this tax business and become one of His disciples."

"Oh, Levi, I wish you would! Jesus is so good and noble, one can seem to see heaven in His glorious face!"

"Well, Mary, I thought that would please you, and I have accepted. I took Jesus up at once. I just wrote my resignation to the governor and locked my desk. I am done with it forever, and, Mary, if you don't mind, I wish you would never call me Levi again. Suppose you call me Matthew: that means, the gift of God. And I feel that this call of Jesus brings me very close to God and His love. I want to be done with the old life, and really become a new man in fellowship with Jesus."

"Oh, I am so happy," exclaimed Mary. "I will love to call you Matthew, and help you all I can. Say, dear, wouldn't it be a good thing to give a farewell dinner to all your old friends among the tax-collectors and have Jesus and His other disciples present. That would give you a good chance to introduce them all to Jesus. I do not see how any one could meet Jesus socially and not love Him, and I do not doubt that many of them will become His friends if they have opportunity to talk with Him."

"That would be fine for us, and fine for the other publicans; but the Pharisees hate us so, and we are so unpopular socially, Jesus might think it

unwise to come to a dinner where all the guests were so despised," said Matthew.

But Mary shook her head and said: "No, Matthew, dear, Jesus would never look at it that way. If any one is unpopular, Jesus seems all the more interested in him. He never seeks after the rich or powerful people, but if any one is very lonely, or is disgraced, or in trouble, or sick, Jesus is sure to be hunting after him. I am sure He would never stay away from our dinner because the guests were all sinners. They seem to be the very people He is most desirous to meet."

"Mary, I am glad you thought about giving a dinner. I never would have thought of that. My! It is wonderful to have a wife like you. You are always thinking of just the right thing at the right time to help me."

"Matthew, that is a wife's part, to think how to make our social life a help and a blessing, and if Jesus meets these friends of yours at dinner, it will give Him a great opportunity to win their friendship. And, dear, have you thought how it will establish you before all the world as an open friend of Jesus?"

"No," replied Matthew, "I had not thought of that, but I am willing for all the world to know it."

"I know you are, husband; and there is no

better way than this dinner. Jesus will be the honour guest at our dinner, and His disciples will be with Him, and you will announce to them all that you, too, have become His disciple, and have given up all else for that. It will save you from any temptation to waver or ever turn back. Oh, I am so glad you are willing to have the dinner. I love Jesus and I love to do Him honour, and it makes me so happy to have you and Jesus friends, the two I love best in all the world. Surely this is a new and precious epoch we are entering, with Jesus at the head of our table and our chief friend and Lord." And so it was a very happy night in the house of Matthew.

Matthew's wife was right about it. Jesus never hesitated a moment about accepting Matthew's invitation because most of the guests were publicans and sinners.

But Matthew was right about it stirring up a good deal of criticism in the community. Matthew and his wife carried their plan through, and invited as guests at the dinner they gave to Jesus those who had shared in Matthew's shame and disrepute as agents of the Roman government. It shows how genuinely sincere Matthew was in his repentance and confession of Christ, that he made his dinner to the Saviour a really "great feast," and filled it with his fellow sinners in an effort

to bring them in touch with the Lord whom he had determined henceforth to follow. Having found forgiveness of his sins, he longed to bring like pardon to his former associates. As these men had shared in his shame, he now did his best to give them a chance to share in his honour and joy.

But as soon as the dinner was heralded about, the Pharisees began to cry out, "How is it that he eateth with publicans and sinners?"

But Jesus had His answer ready. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." And so Jesus seized a criticism and made it the keynote of His Gospel. And Christianity is never so successful in doing the full work of Christ among men as when it is striking that note loud and clear. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He came to seek sinners and to save them from their sins, and when the Church is hot on the trail of the sinner, it is doing its noblest work in building up noble Christian character. And whenever the Church loses the evangelistic note and makes the chief mission of the Church the culture of a high sainthood among its members, it begins to lose its power to produce saints. It is when in the spirit of Christ we forget ourselves in our anxiety for the salvation of sinners, that Christ is able to develop most clearly

His blessed image in us. The Church of Jesus exists not to coddle saints, but to collar sinners; and when we live in that spirit, the Church thrives, and not only has power to win sinners, but cultivate saints. Think of any great triumphant epoch of Christianity and you will note the truth of this statement. During all the years of Paul's missionary travels, while he was spreading the fame of Jesus to the ends of the known world, and developing the highest moral character among the people to whom he ministered as well as in his own mind and heart, the great cry of his soul everywhere was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." In the days of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and the building up of early Methodism, it was the same note that was struck constantly. John Wesley was the great outdoor preacher, not only in the woods, but in the stone-quarries and in the streets. Wherever sinful men and women could be gathered together to hear, he was ready to cry out the message of Christ as the Saviour of sinners. Let us never forget that the college, and the university, and the Christian hospital, and the library, and all the glorious blessings that attend Christian civilization are, after all, aftermath, the result of the preaching of Christ as the Saviour of lost sinners. It is the Church that is on fire with Christ's longing to save sinners

that is ready to sacrifice to build all those institutions of culture and mercy, which can conserve, but never produce, the glorious results of Christian evangelism. Christian missions also are the fruit of a soul-saving Christianity at home.

Not only is this true, but all these fortresses of Christianity in missions, and hospitals, and colleges should hold it to be their supreme purpose to honour and glorify the Christ in whose teaching and sacrifice they had their birth and reason for existence. The Christian college must be a furnace of loyalty to Christ, the Saviour of sinners. The Christian hospital, the hotel of God, should breathe always the spirit of Him who said to the man who was sick of the palsy, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house."

There is another thought about this dinner Matthew gave to Jesus: It brought holy associations into his home. It was a sort of dedication of his home to the service of Christ. All our homes should be dedicated to the service of Christ. I have never seen any way of doing this so beautiful in its influence on the entire family and so sweet in its fragrant memories afterward as the old-fashioned family altar, when father and mother and children every day invite Jesus to a

fellowship of song and Bible reading and prayer together at the home altar. Children brought up in a home like that are bound to Christ by tender memories that weave all the sacred and holy loves of childhood into their religious faith. No gold mines of earth are rich enough to buy from me the memories of the family altar in front of an old stone fireplace in a log cabin that has been dust and ashes for many a long year.

Some who have read the foregoing paragraphs should find in the story of Matthew's dinner suggestions which may open the door to rich blessings to your own soul. Jesus has been present. As you have been reading, He has paused by your side and looked deep into your eyes. He has been saying to you, quietly and tenderly, "Follow Me!" Will you follow Matthew's example here and now? Matthew seized his opportunity promptly. He did not wait; he did not argue; he did not parley or dally—he arose at once and followed Jesus, out of disgrace and dishonour into a worthy Christian life. He made his acceptance of Christ's invitation just as definite and certain as possible. He made a public dinner to Jesus and burned all his bridges behind him. He introduced Jesus to every friend he had.

Will you follow his example? Some of your friends are greatly influenced by you; not only your

own salvation, but theirs, hangs on the balance. If you will obey Christ and openly confess Him now, you will turn the scale for them in favour of Jesus. It will be a blessed thing to make your coming not only joyous to your own heart, but a joy-bringer to the homes of your friends. Rise up and follow Jesus now!

V.

THE NIGHT JESUS SPENT WITH ZACCHÆUS OF JERICHO

"And Jesus said unto him, To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."—LUKE 19:9–10.

ZACCHÆUS was the chief internal revenue collector in the important city of Jericho. He had made a lot of money, and had become a very rich man as tax-collector for the despised Roman government. But there was good stuff in Zacchæus; he had a good mind and really desired to be a much better man than he was. A tax-collector in Jericho at that day was in a hard place. On one side the unscrupulous and corrupt Roman governors were out to make all the money they could, and on the other side the equally unscrupulous and shrewd Jewish merchants were scheming to pay as little as possible to a government they hated and counted it a virtue to cheat. There was almost unlimited opportunity for graft for a smart, tactful collector, and a very dangerous berth for one who tried to be honest.

Zacchæus had evidently been tactful and had become a rich man.

Now Zacchæus, when news reached his office that Jesus of Nazareth was coming up the road on His way to Jerusalem, was very much interested and even excited. He had heard a good deal about Jesus. Some time before another tax-collector in Jerusalem had given a big dinner to Jesus and had become one of His disciples. This man, Levi, who from the day of the beginning of his discipleship to Christ had called himself Matthew, had been a well-known collector, and Zacchæus had been acquainted with some other publicans or collectors who had attended that dinner. Some of the reports that had come to him from these friends had greatly interested him, and had made him determined to see Jesus himself, if the opportunity ever came his way; so Zacchæus locked up his desk and went out into the street where the crowd was already gathering to see Jesus. There was a great deal of excitement in the town over news which had just come in that morning, that a very well-known blind beggar, an interesting character named Bartimæus, known to Zacchæus and many others in Jericho, had practically held up the procession as Jesus was passing by, and had been healed, and could now see as well as any one, and who, because of his great joy over receiv-

ing his sight, was accompanying Jesus and His party and attracting nearly as much attention as Jesus Himself. All these things working together gave Zacchæus an irresistible desire to see Christ.

Now, in a crowd, Zacchæus was at a great disadvantage. He had inherited from his ancestry a pair of very short legs, and the average crowd was so much taller than he, that he did not stand much chance of getting to see Christ. But Zacchæus had been a little man all his life, and had learned a good many ways of overcoming this handicap, and noticing a sycamore tree with wide-spreading branches standing near where Jesus would have to pass as He came into town, he quickly climbed up, and soon was in a position where he could see Christ better than the tallest man in the crowd. So, when Jesus came, Zacchæus had an unobstructed view. First coming on ahead was a group led by Bartimæus. He was very happy, and to every one of his acquaintances he would cry out: "See what has happened to me! Jesus of Nazareth did it! Why, He not only opened my eyes, but He has forgiven my sins. I feel like a new man. I just want to thank God all the time. Oh, friends, I believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ foretold by the prophets; surely no one else could work such miracles as He has wrought on me!"

All this excited Zacchæus more and more. Down in his soul Zacchæus was greatly dissatisfied with himself. He was very unpopular with many people in the town because of his business, but he was more unpopular with himself than with any one else. He knew his life was not right in the sight of God; but he had gotten into an evil tangle, and his life was all a wicked snarl, and he did not know how to unravel it. As he listened to Bartimæus, whom he remembered well as a sad old beggar, and saw how happy he was now, and heard his shouts of praise to God and his thanks to Jesus for his sight and for the forgiveness of his sins, down deep in his wretched heart Zacchæus said to himself: "Oh, if Jesus would only take my affairs in hand and unravel and straighten out this sad mess I have made of my life, and forgive my sins! Oh, if I could only be as happy as Bartimæus, I would gladly give up all my money."

And then Jesus came, with His disciples, and the crowd following, and Zacchæus had no eyes for any one save Jesus. What a man Jesus was to him! It seemed to Zacchæus he had never seen a real man before. Such a face! So full of strength, mingled with gentleness! All power and wisdom seemed to be there, and yet surmounting them pity and love seemed to rule. Before

Zacchæus had climbed into the tree his great fear had been that he would not get to see Jesus; now his great anxiety was that Jesus would not see him—he felt that he could not endure having Christ pass on without seeing him; and just then Christ lifted that wonderful face and their eyes met, and each gazed deep into the eyes of the other. In that moment Zacchæus was possessed with a desire to open his heart to Christ and tell Him all his troubles and do whatever Jesus said he ought to do. Jesus, looking into Zacchæus' soul, loved him. Once before He had looked into eyes full of that same hunger and failed to save the man He loved.

Men in whom Jesus is greatly interested, and whom He loves and seeks with all the energy of His divine nature to bless and save, do not always yield to His entreaties. When Jesus was here among men, men met Him and looked into His glorious eyes, and Jesus loved them; and some were saved, but some failed of salvation. Do you remember the young man, very rich, and high in place and power, who met Jesus joyfully? He had no doubt been listening to Jesus at one of His meetings, and had a great, overpowering emotion suddenly welling up in his soul to be one of Christ's near friends and disciples, and came running to Christ, as He was going away, and said: "Good

Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He was full of enthusiasm; his face was all aglow with his gallant desire to lead some heroic crusade by which he might win the great prize of eternal life.

But Jesus threw him back on the old ten commandments and he was disappointed and said: "All these things have I observed from my youth up." He was a fine, clean, wholesome, upstanding young man, and the writer says, "Jesus loved him." And the Saviour made a dead set for his soul. He saw the weak spot of self-indulgence, his love for riches, and He looked deep into his eyes with infinite love and said: "One thing thou lackest yet: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." Think what a chance he had! Jesus was willing to take him on as one of the immortals whose names and whose usefulness will live forever! He offered him a chance to share the glory of Peter and John forever! But he went away sad, with a cloud on his brow.

Some of you may be saying in your hearts, "If I could have stood in the presence of Jesus as he did, I would have yielded." But I do not know.

Edwin Markham published, in a recent number of Hearst's *International Magazine,* a little poem

entitled, "The Man from the Cross," in which he voices that same faith:

"What would you do if suddenly there at the door
Shakespeare should enter the room, the world's great lover?"
Need I to answer? The moment he stept on the floor
We would rise and uncover!

"But what would you do if Another still greater came,
He who has scars on His hands, the Truth's defender?"
All hearts would thrill, would flash to a single flame:
We would kneel and surrender!

But can you be sure you would surrender, if you will not yield to Him now? See how the great Jewish race as a race turned from Him!

In the same magazine where Markham voiced this faith, James Oppenheim, a Jewish writer, in the next number, this tragic fact laments:

Ho! the mightiest of our young men was born under a star in the midwinter.
His name is written on the sun and it is frosted on the moon. . . .
Earth breathes him like an eternal spring; he is a second sky over the earth.

Ho! we have turned against the mightiest of our young men
And in that denial we have taken on the Christ,
And the two thieves beside the Christ,

And the Magdalen at the feet of the Christ,
And the Judas with thirty silver pieces selling the Christ,
And our twenty centuries in Europe have the shape of a Cross. . . .

May not the same tragedy overtake you! To-day Christ stands before you as He did before that rich young ruler, as He did before the great Jewish race. They failed. God forbid that you shall fail also. Forgiveness, salvation, eternal life are within your reach. For your soul's sake, do not fail!

Christ, looking deep into the eyes of Zacchæus, saw the hunger of his soul and determined to relieve it. I think there is something very significant in the word Jesus uses to show the compelling force of His feeling, as He says: "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I *must* abide at thy house."

It was not "I would like to go home and talk with you;" or, "if you would be pleased to have me, I will go." It is more compelling than anything like that. A soul, a family, a home is at stake, and Jesus says "I *must* abide at thy house." And Zacchæus felt the same way, and he made haste and came down and received Jesus joyfully.

Dwight L. Moody, the greatest expert in soul-winning in his day, said that right there, between the limb of that sycamore tree and the ground,

Zacchæus was converted; and that was the source of the joy he was able to put into his reception of Jesus when he reached the ground. Certain it is that no other experience known to man gives such noble and exquisite joy as the consciousness that one's sins are forgiven and that the soul is accepted by the Saviour, unless it is the twin joy of realizing that we have led another soul into the light of salvation. Those who have known the gladness of meeting Jesus in their own soul's acceptance, know something of the relief and infinite peace which was at the heart of the joy with which Zacchæus led Christ to his home that day in Jericho.

It did not matter to Zacchæus or to Jesus that the self-righteous critics cast sour looks at their backs as they walked down the street toward Zacchæus' house, saying, "He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner." Zacchæus was the very man Jesus came to save. He was a man who had lost the way and whose affairs were in a tangle and who longed for goodness and knew not how to acquire it; so Jesus went home with him to "seek and to save that which was lost."

It was a great day in the house of Zacchæus. As soon as they were in the house, and Zacchæus had introduced his family, he at once, before he would sit down in Christ's presence, made a full

and complete confession. He struck no false note. He went down to bedrock facts. He stood before Christ and said: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold." It was an honest confession. Jesus, who knew what was in man, knew that it was from the depths of his soul, and He accepted it at par value. Jesus said to him: "To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

What did Jesus mean by the expression "son of Abraham" as applied to Zacchæus? We may be sure it was in no narrow racial sense. He was a son of Abraham in the fact that he had faith in God and repented of his sin and sought to do right.

There is a great suggestion in this confession of Zacchæus that may be of vital importance to some of you. I refer to his declaration that if he has wrongfully exacted aught from any man, he will make it right to the last limit of his ability.

There are many men and many women who will never find forgiveness for their sins and never know the joy that came to Zacchæus until they have made honest restoration of ill-gotten gains. God will be no party to giving peace to a sinful

soul who intends to cheat his way into salvation. Absolute honesty is essential to your salvation, and if you have wronged any one and it is possible for you to make it right, Christ will not, cannot, accept your repentance until you have made restoration to the best of your ability.

I have known a great many cases like that, and when restoration was made, peace flowed like a river into the soul of the one making it. My friends, if you have wronged any one by word or deed, financially or otherwise, do not delay to make it right to the last limit of your power, and God will not only receive your repentance and forgive your sins, but He will pour out upon you a blessing so rich in joy that not only your own soul, but all your household, will overflow with the blessed visitation of the divine and loving Christ to your heart and home.

VI

THE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS ELDER BROTHER

A SERMON FOR MEN ONLY

"*I will arise and go to my father.*"—LUKE 15: 18.

SOMEWHERE in the Valley of the World a father lived with his two sons, Prodigal and Selfishness. They lived on a great plantation, in a splendid mansion home, set in the midst of a garden of rare flowers and beautiful fountains, surrounded by orchards of delicious fruits, bordering on wide-reaching and fertile grain fields which, in turn, touched hands with vast and rolling pastures, well watered with springs and flowing streams, along the banks of which herds of cattle and sheep and goats grew and flourished and fattened for the market.

The father was a noble character, whose broad mind and generous heart brought him the love and devotion of an army of servants who cared for the home and the plantation, as well as the reverent and affectionate regard of the neighbours far and near, so that for many miles in every direction he was known as the Father of the Valley.

The father, though a good neighbour and a good citizen, gave himself above all else to his duties as a father. His heart centered in his two sons, Prodigal and Selfishness. The names, as I have given them, reverse the order of their birth, for Selfishness was the elder of the two. But Prodigal, being the baby of the family, was long of first importance; besides, this is peculiarly his story.

The mother of the boys died when Prodigal was born. She went bravely down into the valley and shadow of death after her second boy, as every mother does after her child, and though she found him and gave him life, she could not come back with him.

The noble father courageously took up the double burden and faithfully sought to be both father and mother to his motherless sons. He devoted all the strength of his fine mind and kind heart as well as all his resources of every kind to the bringing up of his sons to be good and worthy men.

Parents who have brought up a family of children, and teachers who have seriously and faithfully dealt with the development of childhood, know well that just as you never see two human faces exactly alike, so every boy or girl is a separate study in personality, with their individual

problems to present to parent or teacher. So it proved at the old home plantation in the Valley of the World. Father had his hands full with those two boys. Never were two children born of one pair of parents more unlike than were Selfishness and Prodigal.

Selfishness, the elder brother, was one of those mature young fellows who never seemed to be a boy. He was old-mannish while still a boy in years. He was a serious-minded youth and very regular in his habits. He was never known to waste anything. While he was still a boy he very carefully laid away and kept all his things. He was given toys like other boys, and though he never cared for them much and seldom played, when he was a grown man he had all his toys and all his boyhood belongings. He did not keep them because he expected to use them or get any pleasure out of them, but because he was so constructed that he never gave anything away. No one about the place could remember that Selfishness had ever in his life given any one anything save a frown or a rebuke. He was very unpopular with the servants, and very early became a grief to his father because of his cold, calculating disposition.

Prodigal went to the other extreme. When he was a small boy, he was all jollity and mirth and love. He filled his father's heart with un-

mixed gladness. All the servants loved him. And while he was very small, if he did not interfere with his own methodical habits, even Selfishness had, sometimes, been known to unbend into smiles at his antics, but never enough to give him any of his own belongings; and as Prodigal grew older, Selfishness came to regard him as an unmitigated nuisance.

As Prodigal grew older his wild, ungoverned impulses, which had been overlooked or forgiven because of his youth, continually got him into trouble and brought grief to his father. If the mother had lived, it might have been that her gentle sway would have been able to keep the confidence of her baby boy up into manhood, and to have held him back from the perils which ere long beset his unwary feet. As it was, he soon got away from his father's guidance. The father loved him always, was ever kind and generous, but the boy grew more self-willed and more indifferent to the grief his wasteful and ungoverned life brought to the great-hearted father.

This estrangement grew rapidly as he began to make friends, not with the best, but with the most thoughtless and least profitable of the young people of the neighbourhood, both among the young men and young women. He was very popular with this class. His great virility, his gay spirits,

his really generous disposition, together with the fact that he had a good deal of money at his disposal, caused him not only to be petted and flattered by the younger and gayer set, but to be much sought after by some designing people who hoped to fatten on what he wasted in his folly.

The good father sought to do his duty by the son he loved with all his heart. He reasoned with him, pointed out the dangers that lay ahead in his path; but Prodigal was young and self-willed, and thought his father was old-fashioned and did not understand how things had changed since he was a boy, so he grew still farther and farther away from his noble father, who often wept and prayed until late at night for his wayward, but beloved, son.

Selfishness, instead of doing what he could to keep Prodigal contented at home, only widened the breach by his continual nagging at his brother's folly, until at last Prodigal determined to get away from all parental restraint and out of reach of his elder brother's faultfinding.

So one day, after a night of dissipation which had brought a patiently tender, but earnest, rebuke from the long-suffering father, Prodigal said: "Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me."

The father was deeply grieved and hurt, but

after reflection and prayer came to the conclusion that nothing but the hard experiences of life would ever bring Prodigal to his senses. The sons, of course, could not legally take their portion until the father's death, except by his free gift. Under the Jewish custom, Prodigal, as the younger son, would be entitled to one-third and Selfishness to two-thirds of the estate. So this great-souled father made an estimate and divided the property so that Prodigal could be at liberty to take his portion. It seems to have been given him in personal property, for the Saviour says that not many days after the first conversation Prodigal "gathered all together and took his journey into a far country."

Selfishness, the elder brother, could hardly restrain his secret delight in getting rid of Prodigal. His own supreme desire was to get money, and so long as Prodigal remained at home with his expensive and wasteful habits, with the property undivided, he stood a chance to lose a part of his own prospective inheritance. So he was greatly pleased when Prodigal took his departure.

But it was a sad day for the father. To him Prodigal was still his baby, the last gift of his beloved wife, and only the hope that the hard experiences in the Far Country would teach lessons of wisdom and send his favourite son back to his

loving arms sustained him. After Prodigal had disappeared from sight in the distance, he went to the secret chamber of his house to plead with God to watch over him and in His own good time to bring him back to him again.

Prodigal had already made some friends in the Far Country. He had met them at occasional parties among the fast set in the nearest big town to his farm home, and had been greatly taken with them. They never seemed to be troubled with any conscientious scruples. They drank strong liquors without compunction, gambled recklessly, and the girls were not so prudish or overly modest as the girls among his farmer neighbours. All these visitors from the Far Country seemed to think of was having a good time, and their idea of having a good time seemed to be to throw themselves thoughtlessly into the carrying out of any giddy idea that entered their minds, without stopping to ask any sober questions about right and wrong. Indeed, they ridiculed the very idea that some things were right and others were wrong. These gay travelers had assured Prodigal that if he would only move to the Far Country, his good looks and fine figure and money would put him at the forefront of the gay set, and he would have the time of his life. So it was with high hopes of endless pleasure and gayety and an escape from

all the sober and borish questions concerning morals and religion, that Prodigal drove his chariot toward the Far Country.

At last he reached the gayest city in the Far Country. He had come well equipped with the best chariot and the best horses that the country afforded, but he soon saw that his city acquaintances thought he looked quite shabby for the city, and as he was an easy spender they introduced him to a fashionable inn, and helped him to acquire a turnout and clothing that marked him as one of the swells and gay bloods of the city. He scattered his money recklessly, thinking he must make an impression, and soon the news spread abroad among the frothiest and fastest outer fringes of society in the most reckless city of even the Far Country, that a green duckling was here to be plucked.

His father's cleanly life, and his brother's abstinence from all sorts of pleasures that cost money, had restrained him at home; but now the leash was off, and he drank recklessly of the wine that gives its colour to the cup, which at last bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. The drinking soon led him into the fascinations of games of chance, and from drinking and gambling it was an easy step to the lure and entanglement with wicked women. A good woman is a young man's

best friend; but a bad woman is his worst enemy. The Bible does not exaggerate in the least when it says of a bad woman that "her house takes hold on hell."

Prodigal had up to this time lived a clean life, so far as women were concerned; but he had heard stories among the gay drinkers and gamblers, with whom he had become hail-fellow-well-met, that stirred his blood and made him feel that he was quite behind the times. So he, fired with strong drink, was quite ready for that third degree in sin which marks a man as well entered in the race for ruin. If the writer of the book of Proverbs had been there one night he would have seen Prodigal—

"Passing through the street near her corner;
And he went the way to her house,
In the twilight, in the evening of the day,
In the middle of the night and in the darkness.
And, behold, there met him a woman
With the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart.

"So she caught him, and kissed him, . . .
With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield;
With the flattering of her lips she forceth him along.
He goeth after her straightway
As an ox goeth to the slaughter . . .
Till an arrow strike through his liver;
As a bird hasteth to the snare,
And knoweth not that it is for his life."

So Prodigal went the broad way that leads to perdition. All that saved him was that his money ran out. He had money enough to have gone the pace at home all his life, but the more expensive vices of the city scattered his store to the four winds, and it was not long until he got to the bottom and realized that a fool and his money had soon parted, and that he had spent his all—and, when it was all gone and he could no longer pay for the revelry, the friends he had made in the Far Country deserted him as quickly as rats will flee from a sinking ship. Friends made in the ways of vice never stand by in adversity.

It is interesting to note that when he had got down to the bottom and had nothing left, he began to think of the farm again. He did not think of going back to his old home yet, but just to get away from the city and get out under the sky in God's open air again. The city that had brought him so near to hell and utter ruin, oh, how he loathed it!

Notice what Jesus says: "And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country."

He was not hired; he felt that he must get out of the city, so he went and begged a chance to

live on a farm in the Far Country. The farmer let him stay, but Prodigal soon found the difference between a farm worker in the Far Country and the old homeland. The farmer sent him to herd swine—the lowest grade of employment in all the land. The hogs fed on the fruit of the carab tree—a bean that grew in pods, much like the seed pod on a honey locust tree, and as Prodigal saw the hogs devouring them, he was glad to share with them to satisfy his hunger. And then at last, eating carab husks with Syrian hogs, he came to days of reflection and said to himself: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger!"

Now while Prodigal is thinking about the old homestead, let us go back and see how fares the father and Selfishness these days.

The noble father has gone on with his pure life, full of generosity and kind deeds to all, beloved by all the neighbourhood; but many have commented on the fact that there is a look of sadness in his face that has grown since Prodigal left home. Never a day has passed but the father has kept his tryst with God in the secret chamber, where he has prayed with a burdened heart not only for Prodigal but also for Selfishness.

Selfishness has been as hard a problem for the

father as Prodigal. As he has grown older, the greedy, miserly streak in his make-up has grown more and more marked. He has made friends with no one save certain scheming and unscrupulous money-getters who have an unsavoury reputation for their hard and unfeeling conduct in their treatment of the poor. They do not often come to the house, for they are fully as disagreeable to the great-hearted father as were the giddy and profligate friends of Prodigal; but Selfishness is often in counsel with them in devising questionable money-getting schemes, and the father grieves and feels that he has been sadly bereft of both his sons.

However, he has never quite lost hope that Prodigal may yet repent and return to him, and every day when he comes out from his hour of secret devotion he looks down the road on which his boy will come if he returns from the Far Country. Every time Selfishness has heard any rumours of his brother's revels in dissipation, he has gloated over it to his father; but the father still prays, and waits, and hopes.

And now at last Prodigal is longing for home and father. For a long time during his wasteful days, when he was plunging madly into sinful debauch with wicked men and equally wicked women, wickedness which he knew would break his fa-

ther's heart, he did his best to put father out of his mind. But now, with only the dumb hogs for company, he has time to think, and father looms large in his memory. Methinks I hear him say: "Father! What a wonderful man Father was! When have I seen a man like Father! I have not seen a single man to be compared to Father since I left home. Why, the best of men in the Far Country would look like pigmies and dwarfs alongside of Father! How big-hearted and fine he was! He was good to everybody. How kind he was to the servants! If they were sick or in trouble he was father to them, too. When a stranger came by, there was always a spare place at the table and a spare bed for the night. And if a neighbour got into trouble or was sick, Father was always on hand to help. My! what a father he was to me! Even when I tried him by my wild, wasteful ways, how patient and tender he was! I used to think he was too old-fashioned. What a fool I was to be ashamed of a glorious father like that! And I got so tired and bored at his family prayers, every morning and evening. Oh, how I would like to hear Father pray again!"

And then Prodigal's heart broke. It had been frozen a long time, but the great thaw had come. No south wind off the Gulf of Mexico, no Chinook wind up in the Northwest, ever blew with such

power as the wind of the Holy Spirit blew on Prodigal's soul then. There were only God and the hogs to see as he sobbed and wept. At first it was only the grief of despair. But when a sinner, tired of sin, begins to weep over his sins, hope soon sprouts under the melting ice of the thawing heart. And very soon I hear Prodigal crying out between his sobs: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: Make me as one of thy hired servants."

Ah, that sounds hopeful! Pride is gone. Self-will is gone. Egotism and insolence are gone. Humility is at the wheel. When a sinful man begins to talk to himself like that, any good thing may come to pass. So I am not astonished that Jesus tells us, "And he arose, and came to his father." He had gone into the Far Country with a fine turnout. He had the best chariot the country town could boast and the best horses on the great home farm. But he goes back penniless. He goes back all the weary miles on foot. But with every step hope springs stronger in his heart, and after a while he comes in sight of home. Oh! was there ever a sight so glorious as that! And then he sees some one standing on the porch looking down the lane toward him. How his heart

beats in his throat as he exclaims: "Why, it's Father! It seems as if he were looking for me! It's just the way he used to stand and peer down the lane when he was expecting me home from town! But he would not know me in these rags and with all this scraggly beard on my face! It's awful to come home to Father like this! Why! Look! He sees me! He knows me! He's coming! He's running!"

And then Prodigal runs, too. They meet. They are in each other's arms. They cannot talk. They just hug each other close and mingle their tears.

But Prodigal feels something must be said, and at last he begins to unload that wonderful speech he had been repeating over and over again all the way home: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." That is as far as he ever got with it. There was a lot more about being taken on as a servant. But the father would not listen to it. He had plenty of servants; his dear old heart was hungry for sons. So he brushed it all away with the shout to his servants, who were now crowding around, sobbing and crying and laughing together, out of sympathy with the father they all loved. "Bring forth quickly," he cried, "the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, and

kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And that old farmhouse went gloriously alive with joy.

Yet, amid all that gladness, there was one gloomy face, and that was the face of Selfishness. Selfishness had been out in the field when Prodigal came home, and by the time he came in for supper the celebration had already begun, and to his amazement and disgust, when he came near to the old farmhouse, he heard music and saw that every window was lighted and that dancing was going on. He was angry in a moment. Surely Father must be getting in his dotage to allow such waste and folly. And when he got near enough, he called one of the servants and demanded: "What does all this foolishness mean?"

"Why, where have you been? Don't you know? Your brother, Prodigal, has come home from the Far Country, and your father is so happy about it that he has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound."

Then Selfishness was angrier than ever. He had hoped he had seen the last of Prodigal, and here he was the center of all this joy. He would not go into the house, and the servant went and told the father.

The father, full of joy and good will toward all

the world, went out to him and begged him to come in and share in the welcome to his brother. But Selfishness sullenly said: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killest for him the fatted calf."

Poor Selfishness! If the father had wished, he could have said: "Son, when have you ever desired to make merry with any one? Your friends are like you, so selfish and cold-hearted there is no happy, wholesome merriment in them." But the father is too tender-hearted to answer him unkindly, so he patiently reasons with him: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

Poor Selfishness! His road home was thornier than Prodigal's.

Some who have read this old but ever new story have felt in your deepest soul that it is God's message to you. Do not let it fail of its purpose! God is that Father; you are that Prodigal from the Far Country. Come home to your Father's heart, here and now!

And, greedy Selfishness, you come too! Deep down in your conscience the Holy Spirit is convicting you of sin, and you realize that you need the forgiving love of your Heavenly Father as certainly as Prodigal. There is room for you both in the Father's heart and home. Come!

VII

THE TWO DINNERS IN SIMON'S HOUSE

A SERMON FOR WOMEN

"And behold, a woman who was in the city, a sinner; . . . brought an alabaster cruse of ointment."—LUKE 7:37.

"Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of pure nard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus."—JOHN 12:3.

"And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster cruse of ointment of pure nard, very costly; and she brake the cruse, and poured it over his head."—MARK 14:3.

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at meat."—MATTHEW 26:6.

THERE must undoubtedly have been two dinners at the same house of Simon. The same man and the same house, though in one case he is spoken of as one of the Pharisees, and in the latter case he is called Simon the leper. The first dinner is recorded only by Luke, and took place early in the ministry of

Jesus. The latter dinner is recorded by Matthew, Mark and John, and occurred in the Saviour's last week on earth. The women who are the chief actors in each occasion are entirely different women.

I am aware that St. Augustine gives it as his opinion that Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, is the woman in each case. But there is nothing to substantiate that theory. He offers no evidence whatever to back up his opinion, and Luke's story is so graphically told and so full of detail that we are very sure Mary of Bethany is not the woman in that case. Besides there is not the slightest suggestion in any of the Bible stories or in any of the early traditions coming down from those days among the early Christians, that suggests such a thing as any social impropriety or lack of moral character in Mary of Bethany. There is not even a hint that she had lived a life of vice.

Neither is there any reason for coupling the name of Mary Magdalene with this first dinner, the story of which is told by St. Luke. Christian artists assumed that because Luke records that Christ cast seven devils out of Mary of Magdala she was the woman who came to the Master in tears of repentance at this first dinner in Simon's house. But there is no real reason for such an

idea. Practically all the Bible tells us about Mary Magdalene is in that brief paragraph of Luke's when he says: "And with him the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuzas Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered unto them of their substance."

This simple mention tells us Mary belonged to Magdala, one of the thriving towns which then clustered round the Lake of Galilee, and she was called the Magdalene to distinguish her from other Marys. She was undoubtedly of good birth, a Jewish gentlewoman, since Luke gives her precedence over the wife of Herod's steward. Her time seems to have been at her disposal, and being well-to-do, she was able to minister financially to the needs of Jesus and His disciples. The reason for her great devotion to Christ is found by Luke in the fact that out of her went seven devils. Whatever sins of temper or conduct might be suggested by that statement, there is nothing in the account to suggest social immorality, since she was in accepted friendship with the other devout women whose characters were above reproach. So we are forced to the opinion that the early Christian art which made the very name Magdalene a

synonym for harlot is cruelly unjust and entirely without reason.

About this unknown woman who came to Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee, we know nothing save what is told us by Luke. We know from Luke's story that she was not an invited guest, but having heard that Christ was there, and desiring above all else on earth the opportunity of showing her faith in Him, and receiving from Him the forgiveness of her many sins, she went in, uninvited, to Simon's house, and presented herself in tears at the feet of Jesus as He reclined, according to the custom of the day, at the dinner table.

How did this woman come to know about and believe on Jesus? I have my own idea, and while I have no evidence to sustain it, I think it extremely probable and as good as any other.

We have another case of a sinful woman in the New Testament story, a woman who had been taken prisoner in the act of her sin and was brought to Jesus while He was teaching in the Temple. And these Scribes and Pharisees brought the shamed and embarrassed woman to Christ, not because they were especially grieved or shocked at her sin, but hoping to use her as a trap in which they might catch the Saviour and have an excuse to bring Him before the Sanhedrim for trial.

You recall the story which John tells in the eighth chapter of his Gospel: They brought the poor woman right into the midst of the group gathered about Jesus, and sat her down before Him and said: "Teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou of her?" John says that they put it to Him that way "trying him, that they might have whereof to accuse him." But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. But as they sneered, and continued to press their question, thinking they had embarrassed Him, He straightened up and said calmly and quietly, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." If Jesus had fired a shotgun into that crowd, He could not have scattered them faster; one after another they sneaked out of the Temple, and after a while Jesus looked up and said: "Woman, where are they? did no man condemn thee?" And she said: "No man, Lord." And Jesus said: "Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more."

Well, that is all that is told us in the Bible about that woman, but I think I know something more about her. I think she went home full of wonder about it all and full of love and gratitude to Jesus. The old life seemed hateful to her, and

she determined to keep faith with Christ and sin no more, and so she did not go back any more to the old revelling places, and one of her friends, a woman we will call Migdol, who really liked her, hunted her up at her home, wanting to know what had happened. So she told her story of how she had been dragged to the Temple in disgrace and how Jesus had saved her. And as she tells the story I draw near and listen: "And, oh, Migdol, I wish you too could see Jesus; He is the most wonderful man I ever dreamed of. I felt so safe with Him. My sins never seemed so bad, so black, as when I looked in His kind eyes, and yet they looked at me as if He understood, and yet loved me, and wanted to help me to be good. And when He said: 'Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way: from henceforth sin no more,' I felt as though a great door shut to behind me, between me and all that old wicked life, and I am determined that I will die before I will ever go back into it again. I just feel that it would break His heart if I did, and I could not bear to hurt and grieve Him."

Migdol listened in astonishment and said, "I did not know there was any one like that."

"I did not either until I saw Him, but, Migdol, I feel like a new woman since I looked in His eyes, and He spoke so kindly to me. I have got my old

self-respect back again, and with God's help I am going to be a good woman and keep faith with Jesus and 'sin no more.'"

Migdol's eyes were full of tears now, and she said with infinite longing in her voice: "I wish I could see Him, too. I am awfully sick and tired of this wretched life I have been leading. Where do you suppose I might find Him?"

"Why, Migdol, I can tell you where you can find Him this very evening. One of my neighbours has a son who delivers goods from the store at the house of Simon, the rich Pharisee, and the steward told him that the famous Rabbi people are talking about so much, Jesus of Nazareth, was to be a guest at dinner there to-day."

"Well," said Migdol, "I am going to walk around that way a little before dinner time, and I pray God I may get to see Him. If it could do me as much good as it has you, it would be worth traveling a week to find Him."

Then Migdol went home, greatly excited with this new idea about Jesus.

Poor woman! Her sins were giving her only misery and disappointment. She was feeding on ashes. The pleasures of sin are only a scaffold to build wicked habits that become cruel chains. But her friend's story about Jesus and the wonderful change that had been wrought in her gave

Migdol hope that possibly there was a chance for her, too, to escape the horrible slough of sin and be a good and happy woman again.

As she thought and planned how she might get to see Him, she noticed a beautiful alabaster cruse of precious ointment, and she took it up, saying to herself, "I will take it with me, and who knows but I may get a chance to anoint this wonderful friend of poor, sinful girls." And so she went away down the street, and as she drew near Simon's fine house, it being a mild day, the doors were open and she saw Jesus, already in His place, with the other guests at the table. As she looked on that wonderful face her heart went out to Him in confidence and trust. No woman ever looked on the face of Jesus without trusting Him, and Migdol, forgetting everything save that here was her chance to get to Jesus and show how she trusted Him and honoured Him, went right on into the house, uninvited though she was.

She stood for a moment behind Him, silently weeping, and then suddenly her heart broke and she flung herself down at the Master's feet and her flood of bitter tears of repentance for her sins and all the waste of her wretched life fell on the feet of Jesus. She had a wealth of beautiful hair that in the violence of her grief had been loosened and now fell about her shoulders. She took the long

locks of her hair and wiped her tears from the feet of the Saviour.

As soon as she could calm her grief a little, she remembered the precious box of alabaster she had brought. She was so glad now that she had brought it. She wished she might anoint that beautiful head; but no, her sins were too great, she would anoint His dear feet, and show her humility and faith all the more. The perfume filled the room and, of course, her conduct was the center of all eyes and absorbed both host and guests. Jesus understood perfectly. He, who knew what was in man, knew from the start that here was a poor sinful soul, repenting of sin and seeking for forgiveness and salvation; and forth from His great heart of love went waves of healing mercy. But Simon, his Pharisee host, was full of critical questioning. As he looked on he said to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner."

Now Jesus knew what was going on in Simon's mind as well as the great surrender that was taking place in the heart of Migdol, so He turned to Simon and said: "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath wetted my feet with her

tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me no kiss: but she, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but she hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." And turning to Migdol, whose tears of repentance had turned to a summer rain of joy at His wonderful words to Simon, Jesus looked into her radiant face, shining like a rainbow through her tears, and said, "Thy sins are forgiven, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." And Migdol went out from Simon's dinner, walking on air, to be henceforth the devoted and joyous friend and witness to Christ and His power to forgive sins.

Now just a word about this second dinner: It was evidently a community dinner to Jesus, held in Simon's house because it was the largest and most commodious of any in the group. See what John says of it: "So they made him a supper there: and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of pure nard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

Matthew and Mark also tell this incident as occurring during this last week of the Saviour's life. They do not name Mary as the woman, no doubt because when they wrote their Gospels Mary was still living and they did not wish to call special attention to her; neither do they mention Lazarus, because the Jews might kill him to destroy his witness to Christ. Matthew and Mark state that Mary broke her box of ointment above the head of Jesus. No doubt she did first anoint the Saviour's head and afterward His feet also, and the humility of that act so impressed itself on John's mind that when, as an old man, nearly or quite ninety, he came to write his Gospel, he refers only to the anointing of the feet; and as Mary by that time had gone on to heaven, as well as Lazarus, who is supposed to have lived thirty years after Jesus raised him from the dead, John gives both their names.

Evidently since the first dinner to Jesus in Simon's house, Simon had become a Christian and was a close friend of that little family of Bethany where Martha and Mary and Lazarus lived, for they were all guests at this second dinner and Martha had charge of the serving. And I have no doubt that Simon had told Mary how the woman at the first dinner had anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair, and now

feeling that the end was near in the earthly life of her Lord, Mary shows her humility by following the example of the woman who "was a sinner," no doubt feeling in her grateful heart that it was only the grace of God which had given her own life a sheltered pathway that made the difference between them, and so she, too, kneels at Jesus' feet and anoints them and wipes them with her hair.

So we have these three women who loved Jesus and found in Him a perfect Saviour and the forgiveness of their sins—Mary of Bethany, who early gave her heart's deepest love to Jesus in the sheltered quiet of her own peaceful home; Mary Magdalene, a woman of high social position, but under an evil dominion with sevenfold cords that only Christ had power to break and set her free to a life of sweet and beautiful Christian ministry, which was specially honoured by her Lord by His appearance and words of love to her on the first Easter morning; and poor Migdol, wasted and torn by many sins, yet healed and comforted and saved by the same Lord in whom the Marys trusted and found their all.

Jesus is still the woman's friend. Many women who will read this study have felt their need of a friend, a Saviour, like Jesus. Whatever your sin, whatever your weakness, whatever your need,

Jesus Christ, the divine Man, the perfect Friend, offers Himself to you to-day as your Saviour and your Lord. No woman ever yet regretted giving her trust to Jesus. Bring Him here and now the fragrant alabaster box of your confidence and love, and hear His sweet words of blessing ringing in your ears and in your heart.

VIII

THREE INTERESTING WITNESSES FOR CHRIST

"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."—JOHN 9:25.

"After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus."—JOHN 19:38.

"And there came also Nicodemus, he who at first came to him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds."—JOHN 19:39.

THE first of these three witnesses to Christ was a man who was born blind and with parents so poor that he had to beg for his daily food. And yet John, who wrote a very condensed life of Jesus, uses only four verses to tell about the public confession of Christ by Joseph and Nicodemus, and uses ten times that number to tell about the healing and conversion and confession of the poor blind beggar.

Blindness is a very common affliction in the East. In Europe only one in a thousand are blind, but in Egypt and Palestine one in a hundred are without the blessing of sight. Of the six miracles

connected with blindness which are recorded in the Gospels, this is the only case described as blindness from birth. In this lies its special characteristic, for the blind man spoke truthfully when he said to his questioners, "Since the world began it was never heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind."

The occasion of his healing came about as Jesus was passing by with His disciples. As the group drew near to the blind man's begging stand, one of the disciples put to Jesus the question, no doubt pointing the Master's attention to the blind beggar, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. When I am in the world, I am the light of the world." And then Jesus spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man, and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, not far away; and without an answer back, or quibbling, or delay, he went immediately and washed, and came back seeing.

In the meantime Christ and His disciples had gone on. The beggar seems to have gone home

at once, we can well imagine, in great excitement and delight. His neighbours had a controversy about the matter. Some said: "This is our neighbour's son, that used to sit and beg by the side of the road." But others would not believe it, though they admitted he looked like him; but he said: "I am he." Then they asked him, "How were thine eyes opened?" And he said: "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to Siloam, and wash: so I went away and washed, and I received sight." Then the neighbours wanted to know where Jesus was, but he was unable to tell them.

So some of these curious busybody neighbours took him in hand and brought him to the Pharisees. They at once brought up the question of his being healed on the Sabbath day, and when in answer to their questions he repeated his story of his healing, instead of being happy over him and congratulating him on the wonderful blessing he had received in his sight, they said to him: "This man is not from God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath." But others standing by said: "How can a man that is a sinner do such signs?" And they were divided into two factions. So they turned again to the man who had received his sight and asked what he thought about Christ: "What sayest thou of him, in that he opened thine eyes?"

His answer was, "He is a prophet." Then they began to doubt whether he had ever been blind, and they called his parents as witnesses and asked: "Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?" The parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but how he now seeth, we know not; . . . ask him; he is of age; he shall speak for himself."

I have never taken much stock in those parents. They were cheap and cowardly. They knew very well that their son told the truth about how he received his sight, but they lied to save themselves from being cast out of the synagogue. The boy must have harked back to a nobler grandfather or grandmother, for he was of better stuff than his parents; and when they said to him in a tone of threatening, "Give glory to God: we know that this man is a sinner," he said, "Whether he is a sinner, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." And when they tried to confuse him by asking him over again how he had received his sight, he answered them, "I told you even now, and ye did not hear; wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become his disciples?"

Then they reviled him and spoke insultingly to him. "Thou art his disciple," they said, "but we

are disciples of Moses. We know that God hath spoken unto Moses: but as for this man, we know not whence he is."

Then the real metal that was in the former blind beggar shines forth. He answers, "Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened mine eyes. We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshiper of God, and do his will, him he heareth. Since the world began it was never heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

That was too much for the Pharisees. They could not answer him, so they raged at him: "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" And they cast him out. Poor Pharisees, they were blinder than he. John Ruskin says: "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and to tell what it sees in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk to one who can think; but thousands can think to one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion all in one." To one who can really see,

"The common sun, the air, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise."

When Jesus heard that the Pharisees had cast

the former blind beggar out of the synagogue, He immediately looked him up. You may always depend upon it that Jesus will more than make up for whatever you suffer on account of your fidelity to Him; He will make it up to you many times over. Paul found it so, and could exclaim in the midst of the most terrible troubles that can come to man, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." You will never lose by standing faithfully for Christ. Jesus looked up the man the Pharisees cast out, and when He found him He said: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Quick as a flash came back his reply: "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" Jesus said to him, "Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee." And he said, "Lord, I believe," and right there and then he worshiped Christ as the Son of God.

This blind man, healed of his blindness and converted from his sins, was a wonderful witness for Christ. He never lost a chance to speak out. He did not undertake to speculate about things he knew nothing about; but the things Christ had done for him he knew, and knew better than any one else. They were solid rock under his feet, and he stood there, never wavering for a moment.

Oh, friends, if you have given your heart to Christ and He has forgiven your sins and given you the blessed gladness and assurance of His love in your heart, you have the credentials in your own soul that you are a Christian, and you need not fear what man can do unto you. The Pharisees cast this man out, but, as Mr. Moody used to chuckle and say, "They cast him right into the arms of a loving Saviour." They had no power to separate him from Jesus. And man has no power to do that now. Paul says: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Surely this healed and converted blind man was a first-class witness for Jesus.

Now the other two witnesses I wish to call to your attention were very different men. They were Jewish gentlemen. They were well born, well educated, moral, religious, thoroughly high-toned, cultivated men. They had both been inter-

ested in Jesus during the years of His ministry. They were both members of the Sanhedrim. We have no record that Joseph of Arimathea ever had any personal conversation with Jesus. But we do have a record that he once stood up in a meeting of the Sanhedrim and defended Jesus, and we know from John's statement that he knew sufficiently about Christ to have secretly become His disciple, and that he gave his vote against the condemnation of the Saviour; but his fear of public sentiment had held him from open confession of his faith in and love for Christ until after He was dead. But after Christ had been crucified, Joseph's conscience smote him for his cowardice, and he determined that he would no longer cover up his affection for his Lord, but would let all the world know that he believed on Christ as the Messiah and Saviour of the world. So he hurried away to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus that he might bury it in his own new tomb.

Nicodemus had had still more knowledge of Jesus early in the Saviour's ministry. He had become greatly interested in Christ's teaching as well as in His miracles, and he came to Jesus by night and conversed with Him about many deep things of the soul and concerning man's relation to God. Some of the greatest truths of the Gospel Christ first preached to Nicodemus. It was to him

Jesus announced the great doctrine of the new birth, saying, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

It was to Nicodemus that Jesus revealed the method of salvation by faith, saying, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life."

It was to Nicodemus in that same wonderful conversation that Jesus gave utterance to the marvelous love of God in the atonement for sin through Jesus Christ when He made that glorious utterance: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."

And yet, though he was convinced that Jesus was a teacher come from God, he did not openly come out as His disciple. He did at one time defend Him in the Council, until some one sneeringly wanted to know if he also was a Galilean; but at that he subsided into silence. But when Jesus died on the cross, he, too, was shamed out of his secret discipleship and went with Joseph to bury Jesus.

He brought with him sweet spices and all the rich gifts of love which he had failed to give in Christ's lifetime. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, rich, cultivated, powerful men, both made most open confession of Jesus, but they waited until after He had given His life for them on the shameful and cruel cross before they did it. We may well imagine that in talking together about it afterward, one would say to the other: "I would to God that you and I had given our all to Christ while He lived. We might have given the Saviour many comforts, and the weight of our influence might have swung the minds and hearts of many others to His side." But they did make confession of their faith, and right royally did they do it.

Many of you have known about Jesus all your lives. You are convinced that He is the Saviour of the world. And yet you are giving Him no open confession. He died on the cross for you as truly as He did for Joseph or Nicodemus. He gave Himself as a ransom for your soul. You are not your own. You have been brought back from evil at a great price, even the precious blood of the Son of God. And He asks of you that you shall accept salvation at His hand. He asks that you confess Him before men. He tenderly, lovingly, pleadingly, is saying to you, "Every one who shall

confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven."

Do not, I plead with you, sin against His tenderness and compassion until in grieved and thwarted and disappointed love He will be compelled to say to you: " But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

All the beauty and the joy of the Christian life is now within your reach. Seize now upon all the unsearchable riches of salvation!

IX

THE RESTORATION OF PETER

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."—JOHN 21:17.

IN many ways this restoration of Peter is the most wonderful of all the Bible conversions. No one had known Jesus more intimately than Peter. He had been preëminently the leader in the apostolic band. It was Peter who had first openly declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and had won the praise of the Master for his spiritual discernment.

Peter was one of the three friends of Jesus who made up the inner circle among those twelve chosen friends of Christ whom we call His disciples. On great occasions these three most intimate friends were always with their Lord.

When Jesus went up on the mountain to meet Moses and Elijah, to talk with those mighty servants of God concerning His atoning sacrifice on the cross, and was transfigured before them, He took with Him Peter, James, and John. And

after the last communion, when the Lord went out into the Garden of Gethsemane to His hour of unspeakable agony, it was Peter, James, and John whom the Master took with Him as friends upon whom His soul would lean in that hour of trial. It was Peter who had declared that though all men should forsake Christ, he would remain faithful; yet when the trial came and he had followed Jesus, after His arrest, into the High Priest's yard, and was warming his cold hands at the enemies' fire, it was Peter who allowed the taunt of a servant girl to turn him into a coward, and he profanely and bitterly denied his Lord.

How vividly the picture stands out. Judas has betrayed his Lord with a kiss, with the shameful thirty pieces of silver in his pocket. Peter, brave at first, drew his sword and stained it with blood in Christ's defense; but when rebuked for his action, he seems to have lost all hope and courage; and, when questioned later in the Lord's very presence, denied that he even knew Him. And then the cock crowed, and he caught the tender, sad look of Christ, and it broke his heart. He went out and wept bitterly.

It must have been a sad and awful time for Peter from then until Easter morning. On Easter day a ray of sunlight shot through the darkness of Peter's gloom. For on that first Easter morning,

when the Marys came and found the empty tomb, Jesus appeared to them and told them to go and tell His disciples " and Peter " of His resurrection. That Christ should especially have mentioned him in that way, as one to receive personal messages from the Lord, must have been healing balm to his sore heart.

But peace did not come until the morning following the night when they had fished all night and caught nothing, and Jesus appeared in the dawn walking on the beach. And the Lord called to them, " Children, have ye aught to eat? " And they answered Him, " No." And He directed them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and the catch was so great they could not draw it in. Then it was John who said to Peter, " It is the Lord "; and Peter's poor, sore bleeding heart leaped with hope. He said to himself, " This is my chance to have a word with Jesus, and tell Him how I repent of my sin." And immediately he girt his fisher's coat about him and plunged into the water and swam for Jesus. And at Jesus' feet Peter told his story of confession, poured out his heart to his loving Master. Then they brought in the fish, and Peter counted them and found there were one hundred and fifty-three. Peter was a good fisherman. Then Jesus is host, and cooks the fish and serves them, and when they have

eaten together, Christ makes Peter's restoration certain to the minds and knowledge of the other disciples. Suddenly turning to Peter as they reclined about their open-air camp breakfast table, Jesus says to Peter: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" And Peter answers: "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." And then a second time He said to Peter: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" and Peter answers again, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." And Jesus says, "Tend my sheep." And then for the third time Jesus says to Peter, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" Peter was grieved at the third repetition of the question, and in sorrow he exclaims, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." You will notice how different this reply of Peter's is to the time when he, with so much self-confident bravado, declared, "Though all men forsake thee, I will be faithful." Then he was trusting in himself, but now he appeals to Christ's knowledge of his heart, and his reliance, not on himself, but on the Lord. And so Peter's backsliding was healed and he was restored to his fellowship with God and Christ and to his place of leadership in the apostolic band.

This wonderful restoration of Peter has gone into the literature and art of the Church and of

the world. One of the most interesting stories connected with it that has ever come to my knowledge was told recently by Miss Genevieve Cowles in the November and December numbers of *McClure's Magazine* for 1922.

Miss Cowles and her twin sister, who was also an artist, were given a commission to paint six altar panels in a chapel of Christ Church, New Haven, Connecticut. One of these panels was to illustrate the cry for release from bondage. The subject given for this panel was from the prayer, "O key of David and Scepter of the House of Israel, thou that openest and no man shutteth, and shuttest and no man openeth, come and loose the prisoner from the prison house, and him that sitteth in darkness from the shadow of death."

To really illustrate this prayer, Miss Cowles felt that she must visit a prison and saturate her soul with the prison atmosphere, absorb the prison spirit, and see how a prisoner looked.

It was during these investigations that she came to feel an indescribable longing to be of some real Christlike help to prisoners. The prison face, the awful prison look, got on her nerves and pervaded her soul with deep desire to help, until at last she and her sister began daily to pray together: "Oh, God! Is there no way to bring back the light to those faces? God! Show the way." At last it

resolved back to the personal equation, as any great longing or vision of the soul does, and they began to cry: "What can we do to help the prisoners?"

Now, these sisters were very poor; they had no money save what they earned by hard work; but they loved God and Christ and their fellow men and wanted to cure some of the heartache they had seen in the faces of prisoners. So, finally, Miss Cowles said to the warden at the prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut, timidly: "If we, my sister and I, should do anything beautiful for the prison, would you accept it? Because before this we have asked hard things by faith, and the faith has been answered."

The warden replied: "I want a great painting to be placed on that blank wall," pointing to the farther end of the prison chapel, a space probably twenty-five feet by forty, "to stand for courage and hope. When a man here loses courage and hope he goes mad." And then he urged these sisters to paint that picture. Their chance had come.

While debating over the theme to be used in the picture, a strange happening decided it. Miss Genevieve Cowles had done a deliberate act of wrong. She awakened in the night and began to cry with conviction of sin; her sister, Maude

Cowles, was with her. She knew her sister was crying because she had done wrong. Her sympathy with her sister's grief made her remember the problem about the picture for the prisoners and, trying to comfort her, she cried out: "Oh, I know what it is!—The message for the prisoners. It is what the Lord said to Peter, 'Feed my sheep.'" And in a moment it came to Miss Genevieve Cowles like a vision, the unutterable beauty of that scene of the after-resurrection days, when the Lord came back and spoke to penitent Peter.

And again and again it kept coming to her, until it was decided. They were twins; they did everything together. It was agreed that Miss Genevieve would paint the Lord and Peter, and Miss Maude, St. John and the background. The other figures would be divided between them, and the painting, as a whole, would be called "The Charge of St. Peter." It was to be a silent sermon of hope and courage.

But it was to cost a lot of money, for it would be a work of years. Where would the money come from? They talked with some friends as poor as themselves, and then with God, and then a letter came from a woman they had never heard of, enclosing twenty-five dollars. A blind girl gave thirty-five dollars for the picture she could never see. It went slowly. Then Miss Maude died. I

have not time to tell of the long struggle. One by one people became interested. Finally she had two thousand dollars in her fund, and was persuaded to take this and go to the Holy Land, where she could get the true atmosphere and perspective from which to paint her great picture. She spent two years in the Holy Land, sustained by friends, known and unknown, who sent voluntary gifts. Once the officials and the prisoners of the Connecticut State Prison united in a subscription for "The Charge of St. Peter."

Then she came back to America and painted her silent sermon of courage and hope. In all, she worked seven years. It was a marvelous labour of love, and if you are ever in Hartford you will be deeply moved if you go out to the Wethersfield Prison and ask to see the great painting, "The Charge of St. Peter" at the end of the prison chapel.

But the most wonderful thing about this wonderful story is the influence of these years of Christlike service by this good woman on some of the prisoners. Take just one. A young boy, sixteen, went out to target practice with a comrade, twelve years ago. They got a bottle of liquor and got drunk and quarreled, and one shot the other and killed him. He ran away, was caught after two years, and was sentenced for life. He has

been in that prison now ten years. Under the influence of Miss Cowles' work he, too, began to paint, and through her Christlike spirit and the influence of her great painting, has himself painted the three crosses on Calvary. He has not great ability as a painter, but he has found a great Saviour on the middle cross, one able to save unto the uttermost, who has filled his soul with hope and courage. And I do not envy any one who can read with a cold heart or dry eyes those wonderful articles of Genevieve Cowles, telling of the way God has used her pictures and her Christian efforts to bring the Christ, who restored Peter, to these poor prisoners. It has been sunlight from Calvary and from Easter morning into many darkened hearts.

Peter did not look as though he was worth saving that night when he bitterly denied his Lord; but Jesus saw something in him that was worth while, and by restoring Peter, made all the glory of Pentecost possible.

Some of you may be in Peter's condition. You have sinned, as Peter did, against the tender friendship and loving kindness of your Lord, and by your worldliness and your cowardice, in the stress of opposition to your Saviour, you have denied Him and brought grief and disappointment to His loving heart. But if, like Peter, you re-

pent of your sin and turn again unto Him—He who forgave Peter and restored him not only to His love, but to His confidence, and who honoured him with still greater trusts, and blessed his efforts beyond all his dreams, will forgive you, and honour you, and bless you with the great and wonderful joy of winning other souls to your Lord. Let Him now restore you to your place in His heart and in the work of bringing blessings unmeasured to your fellow men. How little Peter dreamed of Pentecost at the lake's edge that morning when Jesus said: "Feed my sheep." So you cannot imagine the glorious achievements Christ has in His heart for you, if you let Him heal you of your backsliding and restore unto you the fullness of His love and grace.

Like Peter, you denied your Lord. Now, like Peter, come back to Christ and be saved. When John whispered to Peter, "It is the Lord," Peter, deep down in his soul, said, "This is my chance," and plunged out into the lake and swam for Jesus. And he found Him and found his restoration. He found Pentecost and all his glorious life as a soul-winner there at the feet of Jesus. Oh, backslider, away from God! This is your chance. Jesus is near. Swim for Him now. He will meet you as tenderly as He did Peter, and you, too, will find restoration and heaven at His dear feet.

X

THE OPEN SECRETS OF PENTECOST

"And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place."—ACTS 2: 1.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak."—ACTS 2: 4.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."—ACTS 2: 37–38.

THE first secret of Pentecost may be found in that one word "together," coupled with the phrase "in one place." The Bible declares that one good man filled with the conscious presence of God can whip a thousand ordinary men who are opposed to him, but that two such men working together can "put ten thousand to flight." Frances Willard used to say that that word "together" was the sweetest word in any language. Certain it is that a group of good people, working to promote a noble cause, multiply their power amazingly when they come

together in spirit and in unity of purpose. Nothing weakens the Christian Church so much as to be broken into factions, so that they do not pull together for the Lord's work. Neither wealth, nor culture, nor numbers, however desirable, can take the place of oneness of spirit and devotion to the great mission of the Church, which is to win men and women to Christ. The resurrection of Christ and His occasional meetings with them afterward, and His parting from them on Mount Olivet, and His assurance that if they tarried at Jerusalem the Holy Spirit would come upon them, had brought the disciples into very close fellowship. They had elected a successor to Judas, and had filled up their ranks and stood shoulder to shoulder, and had drawn together, not only in spirit and purpose, but came daily into close touch, physically, in one place, so that they should feel the added power of each other's presence and faith. When we would kindle a great fire for Christ among men, we, too, must bring all our burning souls together in one place, that our spiritual fire may kindle upon one another and flame aloft as a witness to our Lord. The psychology of Christian power is the same now as on the day of Pentecost, and if we would attract the multitude to Jesus, we must bind our forces together.

The second secret of Pentecost is in the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, banishing their fears and turning weak and timid men and women into valiant heroes and heroines who were dauntless in the face of opposition and peril of any kind.

Fear is man's greatest enemy. No man is defeated so long as he is unafraid. Science has long searched for some drug powerful enough to banish physical fear.

A wonderful discovery has recently been made of a shrub or vine known as the "Courage Flower." For many years the medical profession has heard of Caapi, but only vaguely. Baron Humboldt, the German explorer of the last century, heard the natives of Brazil speak of a strange potion which made the savages of the South American hinterland reckless in battle. A later explorer, Richard Bruce, saw the vine, with vivid red blossoms, which his native guide called the "Courage Flower." Weiss, another famous explorer, witnessed an Indian change from a craven to a Hector after drinking a cup of liquid brewed from the vine of the Caapi. Such stories from South America seemed to men of science like fairy tales, but as they persisted, and the need of science for some means to rid man of fear was very great, the scientific men kept saying, "If

some way could be found to deaden the tortured mind during an operation, as parts of the body are deadened by the injection of anæsthesia, and if this could be done without the use of ether or chloroform—dangerous to the heart action—millions of lives might be saved."

So, a while ago, Dr. H. H. Rusby, President of the College of Pharmacy of Columbia University, decided to obtain a sample of this wonderful vine. So the expedition was sent out, at an expense of many thousands of dollars, into the unexplored hinterland of South America. It is a wonder land. Great serpents still glide through the forests. Strange mammals roam the jungles. Beautiful ferns tower to extraordinary heights. Exotic flowers burst into blossom. It is the home of the boa constrictor, and anaconda, the tapir, the bird of paradise, the orchid, and the long-sought-for Caapi,—The Courage Flower.

After almost intolerable hardships, the expedition found the object of its quest. Its leader saw the juice of the Caapi vine in action on the savage natives, and after struggles that cost the lives of several men, after paddling many miles up strange rivers, and crossing almost impenetrable forests, fighting fevers and beasts and reptiles and the points of poisoned arrows, he wrenched from the savage wilderness a few pounds of the roots of

the Caapi vine, the juice of which, given a man before an operation, will make him laugh at death, or given an expectant mother, may take her painlessly through childbirth—the wonderful drug that kills fear. In the realm of man's physical comfort and life that is a very wonderful discovery. It may easily prove to be the most wonderful since the discovery of anæsthesia.

But it was a far more wonderful discovery of the power and love and mercy of God in the banishment of fear in the higher realm of the soul when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus in that upper room at Jerusalem. This divine Caapi, the courage flower of the soul, worked differently from that of this magic South American drug. It did not banish fear by deadening the mind to danger, but by opening the eyes of the soul to the realities of the spiritual world and quickening the soul consciousness to realize the infinitely greater importance and value of spiritual things as compared with the physical life.

The story of Pentecost is preëminently the story of this divine Caapi, this divine Courage Flower, of the Holy Spirit. You remember how timid and cowardly the disciples had been. When Jesus was arrested, they all forsook Him and fled. That does not mean that they willfully deserted their Lord, as did Judas, who betrayed Him; but only

that they were thrown into panic by their fears, and ran away. They were like green volunteer soldiers, whose patriotism cannot be doubted, but who cannot hold their nerves steady under fire. So it was with these disciples of Jesus. These fishermen and peasants were strangers to the sights and sounds of the city, and when the stern Roman soldiers came upon them with torches and swords and spears in the Garden of Gethsemane, and led away their Lord a prisoner, even the stalwart and self-reliant Peter became a craven, and wickedly denied his Master.

Now these are the same men, only a few weeks later, with over a hundred others like them; men and women who had known Jesus, who had received mercies at His hands, whose souls had been illuminated by the light of His face, but with the same possibilities of fear and panic in their natures. But when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were quickened and aroused to the realities of the spiritual world, all fear was banished, and the Divine Caapi lifted them above all fear of what their enemies could do to them. They feared no longer the face of man. They feared nothing but to sin against God. Neither wild beasts, nor wicked men, nor martyrdom, could turn them from their course. Fear was gone. That is the first great secret of Pentecost. The consciousness of

the divine love so brought into power in the soul by the Holy Spirit that it entirely casts out fear.

But the Holy Spirit does more than banish fear from the heart and mind of the speaker—it adds unction and spiritual magnetism, which words cannot describe, to the presence and voice and words of the speaker. It took a great blundering fisherman like Peter, who never dreamed of being an orator, and made him an evangelist of transcendent power over great masses of men. It took a hundred and twenty peasant people, who had been timid and backward, and charged their stammering speech and even their tears with an electric force that no one could withstand. It drew the crowd to Pentecost as nothing else could have done. It still draws wherever it appears. Wherever, anywhere, in country or city, a company of earnest people are on fire with the presence of the Holy Spirit—there the crowd will come to see them consumed by the holy flames. Let the word go forth from any church that the Holy Spirit is present with great power, that sinners are being convicted of sin, that repenting souls are being converted, and the multitude will flock thither. Nothing is so interesting as life; and the higher the type of life, the more interesting it is. There is no life so interesting as the life of the Spirit of

God working in the hearts and minds of men and women.

The third secret of Pentecost is the personal ministry carried on by the individual Christians in the crowd. It was not only Peter and the apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit, but every one of the company of one hundred and twenty Christians were so conscious of the presence of God in their souls that each one of them became a preacher of righteousness and a personal witness to the power of Christ to forgive sins. There must have been some wonderful testimonies there that day. Think who were there: Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in that crowd bearing witness to her divine Son. Think what a testimony she had to bear. What a mothers' meeting Mary, the mother of Jesus, could lead, and how she could persuade them to believe on her Son! Mary Magdalene also was there. She had an Easter story that would convince any woman with an open mind that Christ had power to burst asunder the bonds of death and the grave. And that poor sinful woman of the street, who went uninvited into the house of Simon the leper and washed Christ's feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head and won the forgiveness of all her many sins, had a message for

many a sad-hearted woman in that multitude. And old Bartimæus, who had once been blind, but now could see. What a tale of Christ's consideration and mercy he had to tell! And Zacchæus had a tale for publicans and tax-gatherers, of a night session in his own home in Jericho, that would melt the hearts of other men in like position. It may be the man of Gadara and his wife were there to bear testimony to their home, once broken by sin, but now remade in peace and joy. And so on through that great crowd you could search out a hundred and twenty preachers, each one with his or her own individual story of Christ's forgiving love to tell to his neighbour, in that vast throng, where the one question on every one's lips was, "What can I do to be saved?"

And the one answer everywhere given, from Peter to Mary Magdalene, or Lazarus whom He raised from the dead, or the leper who had been cleansed, or the man who had carried home his bed after Jesus healed him, was, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." To repent is to quit your sin and turn from it. And if a man repent and turn from his sins, Christ is willing and able to forgive him and cleanse him from all sin and unrighteousness. Pentecost can come only by clear-cut, genuine turning away from sin

to Christ. No man or set of men can get up or work up a Pentecost. It takes a band of faithful Christian men and women pointing sinners to Christ, and an honest forsaking of sin on the part of the sinner who hears the message, to bring about Pentecost.

What are all the requisites for Pentecost?

First, a company of Christian men and women, together, in one place, seeking to bear testimony to our Lord and call the attention of those who do not know Him to His power and willingness to save.

Second, the presence of the Holy Spirit. His presence in our hearts takes away the timidity and fear that sometimes locks our lips in silence. We can bear glad testimony to the fact that when we were far from Him in sin, He sought us out, and forgave us, and took us out of the miry clay and set our feet upon a rock.

But Peter might have preached his fiery message; the one hundred and twenty Christian men and women, led by John, and Zacchæus, and Bartimæus, and Mary the mother of Jesus, might have gone among the multitude telling their personal experience with the Lord with tongues all aflame with the unction of the Holy Spirit; and the Pentecost of salvation would have failed if the men and women in the crowd whose hearts were

pricked into conviction of sin had refused to yield to the call from heaven. After all, it was the yielding, repenting sinner that made Pentecost possible. My friend, you who are away from God, who are conscious in your conscience that you are a sinner against divine love and grace, it is at last put up to the door of your heart. You have heard the message of the Gospel. You are convinced that you are in the wrong. You are persuaded that Christ is the divine Saviour of the world. You have proved again and again that you cannot save yourself. Again and again you have determined to break the chains of evil habit, and have failed. You do believe that Jesus Christ has saved other men and women from sin, and that He has power to save you. You are convinced that He is not only able to save you, but that He is willing to save you. There is only one thing lacking, then, to complete Pentecost. The friends of Jesus are fully united in their spirit and purpose. They have united their prayers and their loving devotion. The Holy Spirit is here. We have felt Him in our hearts. He has touched our lips with the live coal of His presence. He has been felt by some of you in your hearts and consciences. Will you complete Pentecost?

You have heard the divine message. You have been pricked in your hearts. You have been con-

victed of your sin. Will you yield? It was the yielding men and women who crowded about Peter and his comrades and said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" who made Pentecost possible. Now is the day of salvation. The conditions have not changed since Peter's day. Christ is still the only Name given under heaven or among men whereby we can be saved. Repent of your sin, and make open confession of your faith in Christ, and you shall receive the remission of your sins and enter into the gates of the new life.

XI

MERCY AND HEALING AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE

"Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up: and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength. And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."—ACTS 3:4–8.

CHRISTIANS working in fellowship are always more useful and have greater power for good. One may be able to chase a thousand, but two can put ten thousand to flight. Peter and John were, perhaps, the eldest and the youngest of the twelve immortals who had had three years of precious fellowship with Christ during the years of His ministry. They were old friends from their fishing days, and one supplemented the other. Peter and John together were more than twice as effective as either alone.

It was like Moody and Sankey at a later day.

Neither of them alone was half as efficient in soul-winning as the two were together. Some one sings:

"And as of old by two and two
His herald saints the Saviour sent
To soften hearts like morning dew,
Where He to shine in mercy meant;

"So evermore He deems His Name
Best honoured, and His way prepared,
When watching by His altar flame
He sees His servants duly paired.

"He loves when age and youth are met,
Fervent old age and youth serene,
Their high and low in concord set
For sacred song, joy's golden mean.

"So when two work together, each for each
Is quick to plan, and can the other teach;
But when alone one seeks the best to know,
His skill is weaker and his thoughts are slow."

There is a divine value in the Scripture injunction that we assemble ourselves together to worship God and to increase our love for Christ.

This is true not only in our added power in fellowship, but also in the added regularity it brings about in our worship. Just as the healthiest people are those who eat wholesome meals at regular intervals, so you will find the world over that the healthiest Christians, the men and women who are

most effective as the soldiers of Jesus Christ, are those who are scrupulously careful to be faithful and regular attendants at the stated and customary meetings of the church.

Peter and John were on their way to regular prayer meeting when this great opportunity came to them to save a soul and greatly advance the cause of Christ. Thomas, the doubting disciple, had much sorrow because he was not at prayer meeting when Jesus appeared to the others; so Peter and John were greatly blessed on their way to prayer meeting.

It is an exceedingly interesting story. It is a week-day morning prayer meeting. It is a blessed privilege and a glorious habit to start every day with prayer.

"Do not hurry in the morning
To the duties of the day;
Spend a little time with Jesus,
Reverently kneel and pray.

"Constantly He longs to guide us
On our journey day by day;
Longs to bless us with His presence,
As we pass along the way."

And when God blesses us, it means that we become a blessing to others.

Peter and John, on their way to the morning prayer meeting, drew near to the gate Beautiful,

the principal entrance to the Temple, and there, waiting, with the beggar's whine and the beggar's expectant look, sat a man who had been crippled and lame from the day he was born, and who for many years had been carried by his friends and set down in this place to beg alms. And as Peter and John drew near, he asked an alm of them, and they paused to look at him. The two friends fastened their eyes on him together, and Peter, speaking for both of them, said in a commanding voice, "Look on us!"

What interest that must have excited in that lame man's mind. I venture that never in all the years he had lain there had any one ever said anything like that. He must have felt that something unusual was about to happen. I can see the quickened, intense look growing in his bored, weary eyes. And then Peter says: "Silver and gold have I none." The eyes show a little diminution of interest; perhaps there is nothing coming after all—a beggar must have many disappointments. But Peter goes on quickly: "But what I have, that give I thee." The interest quickens in the lame man's eyes again. He wonders what Peter is going to give. And then the wonderful thing happens. The voice of Peter gathers in power and authority as he cries: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength, and he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Peter and John had neither silver nor gold, but yet they were able to greatly bless this man. No millionaire on earth could have blessed him as much as these penniless Christian ministers were able to do.

Dan Crawford, the veteran African missionary, who wrote "Thinking Black," used to lecture on "The Glory of Doing Without," showing how much one can do, and gain, by working amid disadvantages and limitations. He illustrated this by a story of a hunting expedition with an African chief. They came to a thicket where it was thought that a herd of deer were concealed. "Do you see any?" asked the chief. Dr. Crawford looked through his spy-glass and said: "I think I can see two deer." The chief, looking with his naked eyes, said, "I can see twenty."

The lack of glasses had made him train his eyes. Peter and John had no money to give away, but they had come into such relation to God and Christ and the Holy Spirit that they could give such blessings as no money could buy. For forty years this man had lain helpless; but now, at the word

of Peter and through his hand, acting as does the carbon in the electric bulb with relation to the electric current, that power which is back of and the source of the electric current passed to him and healed him, both in body and soul. It is a wonderful thing to be carbon to God's electricity of the Holy Spirit to bless the world!

I have been reading recently the wonderful research work of Thomas A. Edison, which led to the discovery of the thread of carbon now used in the glass bulb of our ordinary electric lights. The great inventor tried all sorts of metals first, but when the current became powerful, each would melt and the light would fail. Then, at last, came the discovery which led to the use of the delicate fibre. But the thing that set my heart to beating like a trip-hammer because of its wonderful spiritual analogy, was that the thread of fibre that is used must first give itself to the flame. It cannot be used until it is itself consumed. Then it will communicate the electric fire and light to the world. It is like that with a Christian. He cannot bring the heavenly fire to the heart of his fellow men until he has been consumed himself upon the altar of God. It was because Peter and John had themselves been consumed by the flame from heaven, that God was able to send the current of His healing mercy through them to the lame man

at the Beautiful Gate. We cannot lift others above our own level. In the grammar of Christianity, "*To Be* comes before *To Do*." If we, ourselves, are full of doubts, hate, evil tempers, bad passions, we cannot impart courage, hope, love, or goodness. The greatest tragedy of the Christian Church today is in the attempt of cold, selfish hearts to carry heaven's current of mercy and salvation to a lost world. We cannot kindle others unless we, ourselves, are on fire from above.

"O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wayward feet.
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
The hungry ones with manna sweet.

"O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea."

Peter and John did not heal the lame man's body or convert his soul through any strength of their own, but through the power of the divine Christ who was their Saviour and Lord. The credentials of Christ are in what He does for men.

Professor Thomson, a brain expert, tells us that the brain of the chimpanzee and orang apes are exactly like the brain of a human being, and that the human brain does not possess a single small convolution which is not also present in the brains

of the apes. Suppose now that some visitor from some other planet should see these two man-like beings. How could he know which was man and which was ape? Only by what they could do. The man could read and write, build houses, railroads, transform a wilderness into a garden. The chimpanzee could do none of these things. What the man can do is the proof that he has a soul implanted by the Almighty and ever-living God. So Jesus did works that man could not do. His miracles were signs and proof that He was not a mere man, but the Son of God in a far higher sense than man is.

We do not need that kind of miracles to-day. We see the supernatural works of the risen Christ in what He has done and is doing in the world. No other religion has done such wonders as Christianity is doing to-day all over the world.

Roger Babson, the greatest financial and statistical expert living on earth at the present time, has probed to the depths the causes of widespread dishonesty in business in this present chaotic condition following as an aftermath of the great World War, and he says:

"The need of the hour is not more factories or materials, not more railroads or steamships, not more armies or more navies, but rather more education based on the teachings of Jesus. The prosperity of our country depends on the motives and purposes of

the people. These motives and purposes are directed only in the right course through religion. In spite of their imperfections, this is why I believe in our churches, and why I am a great optimist on their future. We stand at the crossroads. We must choose between God and mammon. Materialism is undermining our civilization as it has undermined other civilizations. Unless we heed the warning in time and get back to the real fundamentals, we must fall even as the civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome fell—and for the same reason. Statistics of every nation indicate that true religion is the power necessary for the development of its resources, and for its successful continuation."

The work of Jesus Christ is as convincing of His divinity to-day to any open mind as in the days when He dwelt in human form on earth. Take this example:

Two neighbours, a Mr. Welch and a Mr. Johnson, living in adjoining houses, were talking across the hedge which divided their front lawns. Mr. Welch was an earnest Christian; Mr. Johnson was inclined to be skeptical about the divinity of Christianity. In the course of their conversation Johnson said: "Of course, no one believes in miracles nowadays."

"That depends on what you mean by 'miracles,'" said Mr. Welch, thoughtfully. "I believe in them, myself."

"You mean that you think that miracles occurred in the time of Christ? They certainly do

not occur now. Miracles belong to the age of superstition, to the childhood of the race," replied Mr. Johnson.

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Welch. "If you agree that a miracle is a change due to supernatural power, I can show you a miracle to-night, right here in this city. Will you go with me and promise to look and listen with an open mind without prejudice?"

"Surely I will."

The two men met after supper that night, and Welch took his friend to the very worst part of the city, a section where Johnson had never before been. They went into a little hall that was crowded with a throng of men and women so dilapidated in appearance that Johnson whispered to Welch, "What sort of a place have you got me into? This must be a meeting of all the 'down and outs.'"

"It is," said Welch briefly.

After the leader had given out a hymn and made a short prayer, a big man with a voice like thunder rose and spoke.

For half an hour he poured forth a perfect torrent of appeal to that roomful of lost men and women. He begged, urged, commanded them to come to God.

When he finished, a score of men and women

went forward, and that big man knelt with them and prayed for them so tenderly that Johnson found his face wet with tears.

When the meeting closed and Welch and Johnson went out together into the street, Welch said, "Well, you have seen your miracle."

"I grant," said Johnson, "that I have seen an interesting sight and heard a good talk, but where is the miracle?"

This was Welch's reply: "Nine months ago that man you heard talk was a professional gambler and thief. He has been in State prison six different times. He has spent a fortune in drink and vice. To-day he is engaged in an honest trade. He has abandoned all his old, evil habits, and every hour he can spare he labours to redeem lost men and women. He is a devout, prayerful man. I say he is a modern miracle, as great as any Jesus Christ ever performed. Could anything except miraculous power make that man what he is to-night?"

Johnson was silent for a few moments, and then said: "You are right. I shall never disbelieve in miracles again."

Thank God, the most wonderful miracle in all history is being performed again and again in every land where Jesus is faithfully proclaimed.

General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army,

once in his early ministry had his little chapel next to an iron foundry. These iron workers were constantly seeing the red-hot iron converted into useful instruments. They saw the same thing happening in a spiritual way in Booth's chapel, and they nicknamed it "The Converting Shop." They saw there a great spiritual power that could take hold of men's lives and change them. They became red-hot in heart, and then something divine laid hold on them; and, when they came out, they were different.

The Christian Church the world over should be a converting shop to take hold on the common ore out of this wicked world and fashion it into something useful and beautiful both for earth and heaven.

The lame man at the Beautiful Gate had lain useless for forty years, but now, healed in body and soul, he became a useful and a happy member of the community. But no doubt ever and again, in the midst of his rejoicing life, he would think with regret of those forty years of uselessness. And so I want especially to appeal to young men and women. Why not give your heart to Christ in your youth, so that all your life you may to the last limit serve God and bless your fellow men? Why have another year, or even another day, of sin, or idleness, or neglect of God and duty to recall here-

after? Make the best of your life that it is possible to make of it.

Come to Christ now with these words of hope and confident prayer on your lips and in your heart:

"Just as I am, Thine own to be,
Friend of the young, who lovest me,
To consecrate myself to Thee,
O Jesus Christ, I come.

"In the glad morning of my day,
My life to give, my vows to pay,
With no reserve and no delay,
With all my heart, I come.

"I would live ever in the light;
I would work ever for the right;
I would serve Thee with all my might;
Therefore to Thee I come.

"Just as I am, young, strong, and free,
To be the best that I can be,
For truth and righteousness and Thee,
Lord of my life, I come.

"With many dreams of fame and gold,
Success and joy to make me bold,
But dearer still my faith to hold,
For my whole life I come.

"And for Thy sake to win renown,
And then to take my victor's crown,
And at Thy feet to cast it down,
O Master, Lord, I come."

XII

THE CONVERSION OF THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

"Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."—1 TIMOTHY 1 : 15.

TAKEN in all its aspects, considering the streams of influence that have followed it, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus into St. Paul is in my judgment the greatest and most important event in human history since the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul was a man of first magnitude. Some men have been great in mental grasp, and others have been great in action. Paul was equally great in thought and in the power to carry his plans into execution. Paul was a providential man to lift Christianity out of Judaism—a religion for the Jews only—up to the world plane, and make it, as God purposed it, and as Jesus declared it, a religion for all mankind.

To do this, Paul had to overcome the most bitter prejudices the world has ever known. He had to overcome the Jewish hatred for the Gentile and the Gentile contempt for the Jew. To do this, you would think, would require a man to be two men

at one and the same time, and that was practically what Paul was. By birth he was a Jew, but by citizenship he was a Gentile who prided himself on his free Roman citizenship.

When Paul began his preaching of Christ, nearly all the Christians were Jews, and Paul's great mission was to persuade these Jewish Christians to give their Messiah to be the Messiah to the Gentiles, and to persuade the Gentiles to accept a Jewish Messiah as their Saviour and Lord. The only way this could be done was by leading both Jews and Gentiles up to the higher, broader plane of a common humanity in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of the human race. Men of strong intellect are often as narrow as they are strong; but Paul had a mind at once strong and broad. As James Freeman Clarke said of him, "The mind of Paul had the energy of a mountain torrent and the breadth of an inland lake." He had a zeal and enthusiasm that burned its way through all obstacles, yet it was ever directed by a mind that was calm and clear and rational.

Glance a moment only at his story, to get a proper view of his wonderful mental equipment.

He was a Jewish boy, born in a Grecian city renowned throughout Asia Minor for its literature and elegant arts. Then he moved to Jerusalem, where he went through the training of the Phari-

sees, zealously observing all their strict ecclesiastical forms and regulations. No one ever gave the religion of the Pharisees a more thorough trial than Paul. Meantime, while he was having this moral training as a Pharisee, his mind was being developed under Gamaliel, the wisest and most learned teacher of his time. It was this brilliant, scholarly, intense Roman Jew who was brought face to face with Christianity at the martyrdom of Stephen, the first of the early Christians to die gladly for his faith in Jesus.

Stephen was undoubtedly a young man of splendid mind as well as of a personality singularly genuine and pure. He was brought before the Sanhedrim charged with blasphemy against God, against Moses, against the temple, and against divine laws and customs. The defense, a condensed account of which Luke has given us, is very clear and strong. He showed that the temple was not essential to true worship, since Abraham made a covenant with God when there was no temple; that God was with Joseph in the prison in Egypt, when there was no temple; with Moses on Mount Sinai, when there was no temple; with the Hebrews in the wilderness, without a temple. Therefore, Stephen argued that the temple might be destroyed and the true worship, acceptable to God, still go on. That he was not the one guilty of

blasphemy, but those who had wickedly crucified Jesus.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit must have been remarkably manifest in Stephen's face and personality as he spoke. In the hall of the Sanhedrim adjoining the temple the seventy judges, leading the people of the nation, sat in a semicircle. Stephen, brought in by the officers, is standing before them on trial for his life, and for the great cause which is dearer than life to him. As he spoke the inner radiance of his soul shone forth, illuminating his face. It was what Joseph Cook once called the solar look from "the Sun behind the sun." "Other things being equal," said Joseph Cook, "Cæsar's eye goes down whenever it meets and does not possess the solar look. The veriest sick girl, with this solar light behind her eyeballs, is more than a match for Cæsar without it. This radiance cannot be counterfeited, it must have an adequate cause." And as the members of the Council looked on Stephen's face as he spoke, they were amazed before that solar look. For instead of any sign of fear or dread they "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." It was the Sun behind the sun. It was a divine illumination from the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was like Moses' face when he had been forty days on Mount Sinai alone with God. It was like

the face of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. One would think such a manifestation of God's presence would have broken their opposition and melted their hearts; but their prejudice and hate resisted the divine influence and made them hate him worse than ever. In one room of the Palace of Light at the great Exposition at Paris, there was a long row of peculiar mirrors, in which you saw yourself in every odd, peculiar, distorted fashion, except your one natural image. So these men saw the statements and personality of Stephen changed and distorted by their prejudice and hatred. They were cut to the heart, and in the devilish hatred of their wicked souls they rushed upon him and fairly gnashed upon him with their teeth, but instead of reviling them, he looked upward with that glory face and exclaimed, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

That was too much! They must kill him. They stopped their ears, and lifted him in their arms, and cast him out of the city, where they could stone him to death; and as I see going with them Saul of Tarsus, and when the awful murder is under way, see him selected as master of the deed, and see the men who are stoning Stephen first laying their outer clothes down at his feet while he looks on with approval, while he gazes on Stephen,

who under that cruel shower of stones falls on his knees and cries out to God, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," and a little later, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"; I do not wonder that many years afterward, when writing to Timothy, Paul calls himself the chief of sinners.

Strange as it may seem, that horrible death of Stephen was the first step in the conversion of St. Paul.

At first the loss of Stephen seemed irreparable to Christianity. The early Christians were scattered to the four winds. But we may trust God to take care of His cause. When, at a seemingly critical moment, a man or a woman dies, we are ready to cry out, "The loss is irreparable; that man cannot be spared. That young mother, how can her children do without her? That father, the support of his family; that statesman, the tried ruler, the one man in whom all trust, on whom all lean." So men talked when Phillips Brooks died, and when Lincoln was assassinated, and when Roosevelt went so suddenly. So it was when Stephen was killed at the threshold of what seemed a glorious career. "So it was," says Freeman Clarke, "still more, when Jesus went,—the one Being in the world whom the world could not do without; whose place no one could take. The good and the wise, the pure and generous go; the

souls of genius, the creatures of divine inspiration, they go. And then God raises them up on high, to look down on us from above, and be our inspiration. Their great lives and holy examples inspire us to new effort. The memory of the mother lives in her children's hearts. When Jesus went away, He came nearer to His friends than He had been before. The sight of Stephen's death, the sound of Stephen's voice, his face like that of an angel, his cry of joy and triumph in the midst of his agony, these were the first steps in the conversion of St. Paul."

At first Saul went on gloomy, sullen, more set than ever to blot the very name of Jesus out of the earth. Luke graphically describes it in saying that when Saul went to the High Priest for letters to Damascus he was fairly "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."

And then it happened. Who can tell it so well as Paul himself? Many years later, standing before King Agrippa, Paul said: "At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around about me and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And I said, Who art thou,

Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

That day this wonderful man ceased to be Saul the persecutor, and became Paul the Christian.

Saul had been kicking against the goad ever since the day he had looked on that man with the angel face and heard his earnest defense. Oxen were used in farming in Saul's day, and when the rebellious oxen flung out their heels in angry protest, they encountered a somewhat cruel device. The team or shaft of the ploughshare was faced with small, sharp iron spikes; and when they kicked, they were painfully wounded. So Saul had in his own memory and conscience, memories of Stephen's defense, and Stephen's face, and the love and tenderness of his dying prayer, sharp goads that kept him under continual conviction of sin, so that when Jesus appeared to him with this clear cut declaration, Saul felt the truth of Christ's statement and at the same moment was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God, and Saviour of the world; the only one who could forgive sins, and that he was a sinner in dire need of forgiveness. And in that tremendous moment he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

That was the great surrender. Saul's salvation was certain from that moment. The going on to

Damascus, the coming of Ananias the saint to open his eyes, all that followed was only incidental. The great moment was when Saul, seeing his sin, surrendered and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

How wonderful was that conversion! Saul, the brightest young man of his age, was thoroughly convinced of the divinity of Jesus and His power to forgive sins. The change in him was complete. Old things passed away, and all things became new. He put off the old man with his evil deeds, and he put on the new man, clothed upon with the purity and love of Christ. All the turmoil and strife and hatred that had been raging in his soul was cast out, and he was filled with a great peace. Every past ambition and purpose of his life he threw away to become the witness to Christ and His power to save. Long afterward he could say, "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

How wonderfully Paul's conversion stood the test. No test can be conceived that Paul did not

endure, and yet on land or sea, in sickness and in health, among enemies or friends, Paul was the steadfast, joyous witness to the Christ who appeared to him on the way to Damascus.

A good many years ago I went down one summer day with a company of friends into that old prison that used to be the dungeon under Cæsar's palace, where Paul had his last days on earth; and the tears of grateful love ran down my face as one of our number read aloud to us the words Paul wrote to Timothy in those days as he waited in suspense for his martyrdom. "For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." And we went up into the Italian sunlight, out of that damp dungeon, asking God that we, too, might make good as Paul did in the Christian race.

Some of you are kicking against the goad. You, too, are under conviction of sin. You believe that you are sinners against God. You believe that Jesus has power to forgive sin, and that salvation must come through Him. And yet you are unsaved. Oh, I pray God you may follow

Paul's example and surrender now to the Christ who has appeared to you as surely as He did to Paul, and who is as ready and willing to save you and fill your life with untold usefulness and blessing as He did his. As that midday vision on the way to Damascus was always the great sunrise to which Paul turned to gather courage and to get evidence to reply to his enemies, so to-day may be the great sunrise of your life if, like Paul, you will now say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

XIII

THE CONVERSION OF A ROMAN CENTURION AND HIS FRIENDS

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word."
—Acts 10:44.

THE conversion of Cornelius and his friends to the number of perhaps over one hundred is one of the most wonderful of all the stories of the spiritual conquests of early Christianity.

If we judge from the centurions which appear in the New Testament record, we would be forced to the opinion that among the captains or centurions of the Roman army at the time of the ministry of Jesus, and the generation which followed, were to be found men who were the very flower of honour and chivalry. Prof. W. M. Clow of Edinburgh says that the Roman Empire was already in decline; but, like every great organization, it had begun to die at the heart. And when the pestilence of moral corruption had infected the governors and counselors of Rome, there were still to be found in the army men of fearless truth, of fine courtesy, and of incorruptible purity. How

the governors in the New Testament stand out in contrast to the centurions described there! All the four centurions are men of moral, even spiritual, beauty. Of one of them the Jews said, "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." And Jesus said of him, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Julius, another centurion, described as "The Centurion of Augustus' Band," "courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty." Another was the centurion who had charge of the arrest of Jesus, and also was in command on the day of the crucifixion, and who, after watching Jesus die, said, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." The fourth was Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian band, stationed at Cæsarea. Cornelius is described by Luke as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always," which was certainly a good recommendation.

Perhaps some of you are saying, "Surely a man like that had no need that Peter should come and preach Christ to him!" But he did need just that exactly. And best of all, Cornelius knew he needed it. It is not enough to have a sincere desire to be a good man. One may have that all his life and still fail. Cornelius was one of the sort of men Dean Farrar has called "seekers after

God"; men like Socrates, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. But Cornelius knew that while he was seeking after God, he had not yet found Him. And the cry of his heart was like the cry of Job: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I would set my cause in order before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me." Both in Job's case and in that of Cornelius, they felt it was not enough to seek God; they must find Him, and commune with Him. There are many men and women like that in Christian lands now. All their lives they have been influenced and restrained by Christian teaching and sentiment. They even say prayers now and again to God. In a vague way they seek after God, as Cornelius did; but they need to find Him in Jesus Christ unto their joyous salvation.

This is a strange story of a prepared preacher for a prepared audience. One day when Cornelius was at his daily prayer, a strange thing happened. His prayer was answered. There are many people who would be as excited as was Cornelius if their prayers were to be suddenly answered.

While Cornelius prayed, an angel stood beside him in broad daylight and said: "Cornelius," and

he was badly scared. But he was a brave, true man, and after a moment he gathered courage enough to ask, "What is it, Lord?" and the angel answered, "Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." And immediately Cornelius obeyed. He called two faithful household servants, and to make sure they would not be held up by the way, he sent a reliable soldier from his own company as guard, and he opened his heart to these three messengers and told them all that had happened, and sent them away over thirty miles to Joppa. It was before the days of autos or trolleys, and the messengers went on foot.

In the meantime, the next morning Peter went up on the flat roof of the house where he was staying to pray to God, and there a wonderful thing happened. He went to sleep after prayer, being very hungry and wishing dinner were ready, and a remarkable dream or vision was given him. The heaven seemed to open right over his head, and a great sheet was let down before him out of the sky, and in the sheet was a great herd of all kinds of four-footed beasts and creeping things and birds, and a voice said to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

But Peter in astonishment said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean." And the voice answered in rebuke, "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common." And this was done three times.

Now while Peter was reflecting on this wonderful vision, and trying to understand it, the three messengers from Cornelius knocked at the door down-stairs. And the Holy Spirit made Peter understand that they were messengers for him, and that it was his duty to go with them, doubting nothing.

So Peter hurried down the stairs on the outside of the house, and astonished the messengers by saying, as he greeted them: "I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?" And they told him their message from Cornelius.

Then Peter, beginning to understand the vision, took them into his friend's house and cared for them over night, and the next morning went home with them to Cæsarea. Realizing, however, that in going to preach Christ to the heathen, or Gentiles, as they called them, he would be criticised, he took a committee of six Jewish Christians with him.

Cornelius was waiting for them, and, feeling that it was a most important occasion, he had sent out and invited in a great many of his relatives

and friends, until there were probably over a hundred waiting with him for the coming of Peter.

Poor Cornelius! He was a good man, but just a poor heathen at best; and when he saw Peter, he was so anxious and excited that he ran to meet him and fell down on his knees before him in worship. That shocked and embarrassed Peter, who shouted as he grasped him by the hand and lifted him up: "Stand up; I myself also am a man!"

Then the two men stood and talked, and after a moment Peter went in and saw the great company which had come together at the call of Cornelius, and standing there before them all Cornelius told Peter and his friends the story of the angel who had directed him to send for Peter, that he might know the way of life, and then turning to Peter he said: "Now, therefore, we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord."

Peter had an open field, and he went at it with all his heart. His first words are historic: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." And from that Peter went right on preaching the old, ever new, Gospel of the birth and life and ministry of Jesus, of His death on the cross for our

sins, and His resurrection from the dead. Remember, it is only a little while since Jesus' death, and it warms our hearts to see how sure Peter, an eye-witness of His death and burial, is of His resurrection from the dead. I can see Peter's confident face and flashing eyes as he shouts to the assembled company in the home of Cornelius: "Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."

It was the old Gospel, the Gospel you have heard again and again ever since you were a boy or girl in Sunday school. Man is a sinner. Jesus Christ is a divine Saviour. Whosoever will may come to Him through faith and find forgiveness of all their sins.

We have only the barest outline of the sermon from what Peter told Luke about it; but as Peter preached Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, the Holy Spirit came upon the people, and they all felt the power and presence of God. It was the Gentiles' Pentecost. And when the six Jewish Christians who had come from Joppa with Peter saw how God blessed these Gentiles who accepted

Christ, and heard their happy testimonies, and listened to them praising God, they were much amazed, and not one of them could make any objection when Peter said, "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" So he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. So you see Peter was more profitable to Cornelius and his friends than an angel. Dr. Arthur Pierson used to say: "However poor a preacher, I can preach the Gospel better than Gabriel can, because Gabriel cannot say what I can say, 'I am a sinner saved by grace.'"

No wonder that the company of kindred and friends who had found Jesus precious to their souls under Peter's preaching besought him to stay with them a few days that he might tell them more of the word of life.

Are there not some lessons in this story for the Church to learn to-day? The truth that God is no respecter of persons is still to be learned in many sections. I have, myself, known a number of churches where the laymen in control greatly desired to have the church grow in membership, but they desired to censor the list of applicants according to their wealth and culture and social position. I was on one occasion invited to become the pastor of a large church that was thinly at-

tended because the wealthier people who had built the church and formerly attended it were now moving away and an industrial population was crowding in. When I had the official board together I said to them: "Why did you ask me to consider becoming the pastor of your church?" One of the men present spoke up frankly and said, "We thought you would draw a large crowd of people and fill the church."

I replied: "I can fill your church; but from what I can see, I am sure you would be very much dissatisfied with me after it was full."

"Why do you think so?" he asked.

My reply was, "Because the class of people you desire to have it filled with are moving away. The class who are taking their places are wage earners, who could never pay the price you have set on your pews. If I were to become your pastor, I should insist on making your pews free, and should seek to fill them with the new crowd of working people who are coming into this section of the city. I can fill the church with those, but when it is full, unless you have changed your spirit, you would not be happy."

I did not accept the invitation, and it took years of unhappy experience before that church was wise enough to learn Peter's lesson that God is no respecter of persons and that the soul of a chauffeur

or a grocer is as valuable in His sight as the soul of a banker or a millionaire.

Revivals of religion have often failed and the Spirit of God has been kept away from evangelistic effort by attempting to select appropriate candidates for God's grace. It is only when we fully realize that every soul is as dear to the heart of God as a son or daughter is to the heart of a father or mother; is dear to Christ as one for whom He shed His blood in atonement on the cross, that we have really learned the great lesson of the glorious spiritual victory in the house of Cornelius.

In my early ministry I had a friend, an earnest young minister, who was deeply desirous of being a soul winner. He began a series of evangelistic meetings, and the first night he asked sinners to come forward in the meeting to be prayed for, an old woman by the name of Jones and her rather feeble-minded son were the only ones at the altar. The spirit of the meeting seemed to congeal about my ardent friend, and when the meeting closed, he asked one of his leading men why the people did not gather more earnestly to pray for seekers.

"Oh," said the layman, "it was only the Joneses again. Every time we undertake to have a revival here, some of that Jones tribe lead off and the respectable people keep away. There's a

whole raft of the Jones kindred down in the south part of town, and if they cannot be kept away, the meeting will be spoiled."

My friend went home, broken-hearted. He did not sleep that night. It was Saturday. He prayed a great deal. At last on Sunday morning he went into the pulpit and preached the best he could on this story of Cornelius; he urged the people to learn Peter's lesson, that all souls were alike dear to the heart of God and Christ, and at the close called a meeting of his official board. He told them of his sleepless night, of the agony he had endured, that he felt that he would rather die than not have a great revival of religion that would shake the wicked town about them and save a multitude of souls. He related the conversation he had had, and finished by saying, "Brethren, I am convinced that our only chance for a great revival of religion in this church and in this town is for us to turn over a new leaf and give God a fair chance to save the Joneses." And he begged them to join with him in an honest effort to reach every member of the off-colour Jones tribe in the whole town, and not to stop until every one of them was converted. He was so desperately in earnest that his burning zeal and his tearful passion for souls carried that whole group off their feet, and on their knees with tears and prayers they

pledged themselves to their pastor and each other and God to save the Joneses.

That Sunday afternoon every member of that whole Jones kindred, no matter how disreputable, was visited and tenderly, earnestly, invited to the evening service, and that night the young pastor preached as never before, and the Holy Spirit fell on the people as on that day when Peter preached in the house of Cornelius, and not only a multitude of the Joneses, but many others, including some of the most respectable and influential citizens of that town, found Christ and the forgiveness of their sins. That meeting ran on for many weeks, and hundreds of souls were saved. Oh, my friends, we must not seek to limit the grace of God, or seek to grade souls. Man is God's child. "Like as a father pitieth his children" He looks on the sorriest one of His family flock. We must not count one of them common or unclean.

And is there not another lesson here that some need to heed? You are not a Christian. All your life you have lived in a Christian land. Your mother taught you to pray before you could talk plainly. Your life has been hedged about and held back from open wickedness by Christian influence and public sentiment. Like Cornelius, you have supported good causes and kindly charities with your money. If people were asked about

you in the community they would say, "He is a good man," "She is a good woman," but "they do not belong to the church."

You believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to atone for your sins, and yet you have never said, "O Lord Jesus, I thank You!" You have never stood up among your friends and neighbours and confessed that all the goodness you have, which they have admired in you, you owe to Jesus. When Christ's friends have met to do Him honour, you have never stood up in their midst and said: "I, too, honour Christ! I, too, confess Him as my Saviour!"

My friends, follow the example of Cornelius and give Jesus at once your open love and confession, and like him you will enter upon a joyous experience unknown to you before.

XIV

THE STORY OF A MIDNIGHT CONVERSION

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."—ACTS 16: 30–31.

WHENEVER a preacher hits the sin which is an important source of revenue to some one in town, he is sure to hear from the man or men whose bank account is being filled from that sin. In the days when the liquor saloons were still open, and were the greatest graft in our cities, it was amazing what a furore could be stirred up by an attack on the saloons, if it went so far as to threaten to shut their doors or cut off sales. The man who was renting his property for the saloon; the gambler who had a concession to fleece the unwary in the back room; the white slaver, and the bawdy-house keeper, who kept the open door to hell up-stairs or in the rear —all these, and others who had a rake-off from the ill-gotten gains of the saloon, were up in arms when that evil spider-den was threatened. And they were all ready to join in browbeating or ston-

ing the preacher who dared to expose the villainy of that particular sin.

The same thing has to be met with to-day when the war is waged on that Judas of modern civilization, the bootlegger and the rum-runner. The banker who lends him money and shares his profits in blood; the newspaper which is bribed to be blind; the politician who is promised dirty votes, are all ready to cry out against the honest preacher who fights for a sober, clean town.

It was like that when Paul and Silas came to the old Roman town of Philippi to preach the Gospel of Jesus. Spiritualism seems to have been the peculiar sin of Philippi. And a young woman who was at the moment the popular medium of the town followed after Paul and Silas as they were going to and from their meetings, and called after them so much as to greatly annoy them; until Paul turned and said to the evil spirit which possessed the medium, "Come out of her." And when this poor girl was made free from the evil spirit, and was no longer devil-driven, she ceased to tell fortunes, and to be a good money-getter for the vicious men who had been exploiting her. And when the money stopped coming in, they immediately aroused themselves to get rid of the preachers who had interfered with their profits. They had Paul and Silas arrested and brought be-

fore the police court, and then they organized a mob to go to the trial and make a show of riot, to scare the judges and insure the punishment of Paul and Silas. After they had had them beaten until they were nearly dead, they turned them over to the jailer of the town and ordered him to keep them safely. He, too, seems to have been a hard-hearted politician, who, without sympathy for their miserable condition, thrust them into the inner prison, which was reserved for the most desperate of prisoners, without food, or any attempt to ameliorate their condition. And, indeed, to emphasize his indifference to their sufferings, he thrust their feet into the stocks.

I have often mused on the probable conversation between Paul and Silas in that inner prison, a conversation which led up to the happenings where Luke takes up the story of the remarkable experiences of the midnight.

I have imagined that Silas was inclined to be depressed and very blue in his feelings as he lay there on his poor bruised and bloody back, with his feet so fast in the stocks that he could not change his position for relief. I hear him say: "Paul, how long do you think we are going to be able to stand this? I feel that this is about the limit of my endurance."

Then I hear the voice of Paul, resonant with

courage and good cheer, as he exclaims, "Cheer up, Silas, these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

Then I hear poor Silas answer, "But, Paul, this pain is very real, and I have not eaten since breakfast, and the hunger is gnawing at my empty stomach, and the pain in my bruised back where the rods cut the flesh and the hunger in my stomach seem very close together to-night."

But Paul comes back with cheerful voice, saying, "Don't be downhearted, Silas. We have not yet begun to suffer as Christ did. Do you remember how He was beaten until He fainted under the cross on the way to Calvary? Do you remember how they nailed Him to the cross, driving the spikes through His hands and feet, and yet He kept His courage and kindness and prayed for the men that crucified Him, and how by refusing to revile His enemies when they reviled Him He won that dying thief to be one of His disciples? Oh, Silas, what a glorious thing it will be if we may so bear our cross here to-night with courage, and hope, and faith, that God may give us some souls out of this prison to rejoice over in that great day! For, Silas, if we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified with Him."

And then I imagine Paul says: "Silas, why not

have a season of prayer? That is what Jesus always did after a hard day; He sometimes prayed all night."

And then Paul leads in prayer. Paul was a mighty man in prayer. The little brief paragraphs of prayer found in Paul's letters show great versatility and power in his prayers. How he must have prayed that night! I can hear him as in the midst of hunger and pain he sincerely pours out the thanksgiving of his great soul for the blessed privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and asks for God's blessing on their enemies. He pours forth his intercession for the cruel jailer, prays that his hard heart may be made tender, and that he and his family and their fellow prisoners may be brought to repent of their sins and be saved. And he pleads with God in the name of Jesus that Silas and himself may conduct themselves so cheerfully, and with such gentleness and patience, that they may be made a great blessing to the jailer and all others in the prison, that he may not harm any one there, but be a help and blessing to all.

Now, the jailer was on his way to bed after a hard day when he was attracted by the sound of Paul's prayer, and he slipped back down the corridor to listen, and as he listened, his conscience troubled him, and a strange wonder and fear took

hold on him. "Just listen to that!" he says to himself. "I have had a good many prisoners curse me for putting them in that dungeon, but that is the first man that ever prayed for me for doing it. He is certainly a new kind of man to me. It must be a wonderful thing to believe in a God like that, one who loves you, and hears you, and answers you. He prays for me as though he loved me and wanted to do me good, instead of getting even with me. It makes me feel awful mean. It was hard to put their feet in those stocks with their backs in a fix like that. I am getting to be a pretty hard man. What if their religion is true? What if Jesus Christ, whom they are preaching, did really rise from the dead, as they claim? Justin, the centurion, who recently came to Philippi, says he was in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus, and he believes Christ was more than man, that He was the Son of God, and that He did really rise from the dead. What if he is right? What if these preachers are right? I have sinned deeply to-night against this God Paul is praying to, if they are right. But if they should get away I would lose my head. A poor jailer is in a hard place these days." And so, worried in his conscience and confused in his mind, and dead tired with the work and worries of a long, hard day, the jailer goes on to bed, and is soon sleeping

the heavy sleep of a worn-out and exhausted man.

When it comes Silas's turn to lead in prayer, he is ready with his appeal to God. He has forgotten the gloom that had depressed him. Paul's enthusiastic faith has been contagious, and his heart has caught the fire from heaven, and when Paul ceases he takes up the prayer, and they are both so comforted by this communion with God and Christ that their hunger and pain are overcome, and when Silas has finished his prayer, Paul says, "Silas, cannot we sing something?"

If they had had Rodeheaver's favourite, I am sure that right there in that inner cell of that Philippi jail, with their feet in the stocks, they would have sung, "Brighten the corner where you are!" For that was just what they were doing. For, as they had been praying, the other prisoners in cells about them had been listening, at first no doubt with sneers and insults, but as the pleading with God for help changed to thanksgiving, and they heard sincere pleading with God for themselves, and noted how, as the prayers proceeded, the tone changed to joy and triumph, they were deeply impressed, and down in most of their wicked hearts there had been a feeling of the loneliness and barrenness of sin, and a rising desire to have some relation to a God that would make

such courage and joy as was shown by Paul and Silas under such fearful conditions possible to their own hearts.

But what will Paul and Silas sing? Hymn books were scarce in Paul's day in Philippi. There are plenty of hymns now that would have been appropriate. How Charles Wesley's "Jesus, Lover of my Soul, let me to Thy bosom fly" would have fitted the situation that dark night!

Toplady's

> "Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee,"

would have answered all right. Or Theodore Roosevelt's favourite—

> "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,"

would have done, or

> "Onward, Christian soldiers,
> Marching as to war"

would have been fine—though they were in no shape for marching just then.

There are plenty of songs now; but none of these hymns of comfort and faith had been written by a thousand years or more. Oh, I know what it was Paul and Silas sang that night! I have not a doubt of it. It was David's precious Shepherd Psalm, and it could not have been much

different from James Montgomery's sweet rendering of it. Just imagine how it must have sounded to those listening prisoners as it rang down the corridors of the jail at Philippi at midnight, rang out in tones of gladness:

"The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know;
I feed in green pastures, safe-folded I rest;
He leadeth my soul where the still waters flow,
Restores me when wandering, redeems when oppressed."

I can imagine how astonished the other prisoners were as they listened.

One listening prisoner says to his cell-mate: "What do you think of that? Those fellows are in an awful condition. They are raw and bleeding, they are held stiff in the stocks, so their backs are kept to the cell floor; they are hungry and half-starved, and still they sing!"

"Listen to what they say," says the other, "'green pastures.' If they are in green pastures to-night in that inner cell, chained to the floor, with their bloody backs, what do you suppose it would take to make a desert for them?"

And just then came the earthquake. Were you ever in an earthquake? If so, you had an interesting experience, one you have never forgotten. I was in a little one once. I was dressing in the morning, facing the front window, with a row of

shade trees in view, when suddenly that row of trees grew wonderfully polite and bowed down to me, and not to be outdone, I bowed down in return, and the vase fell off the mantel, and all the world seemed to be confused; but that was only a little earthquake. This earthquake at midnight that interrupted the song of Paul and Silas is described as a mighty earthquake in a country where earthquakes were not uncommon. The walls of the prison of Philippi reeled to and fro, and every door flew open. Not only the doors, but the stocks in the inner cell were shaken to pieces. The prisoners, confused and not knowing what had happened, came running together into the lobby or common hall of the jail. The jailer had been sound asleep, but the earthquake flung him from his bed, and as consciousness came to him he was in terror and despair. When he saw the jail doors were opening, and heard the prisoners in their excited exclamations in the lobby, he felt sure they would all escape and he would lose his life. Those were grim old days, and the jailer answered for the safe-keeping of his prisoners with his life. So the despairing jailer, fearing that he was ruined and that only disgrace and death awaited him, drew his sword, intending to commit suicide. Then Paul came to the front. Paul was always the leader wherever he went. When a prisoner

on an Alexandrian corn ship, when the storm came, it was Paul who saved captain and crew. It was now Paul who takes the lead and cries out to the despairing jailer, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

At that commanding voice the jailer gathers his scattered guards, and when he has secured lights, he comes to Paul and Silas, the men he has so cruelly fastened in the stocks in the inner dungeon, in fear and trembling. Paul's conduct has convinced him that the Gospel they have been preaching in Philippi is true. No doubt his theology is very vague and confused as yet, but he feels that the way to salvation is known to Paul and Silas, so he falls on his knees before them and cries, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" How the hearts of Paul and Silas must have leaped with joy and gladness then! God had given them the victory. He had answered their prayers. As Jesus won a soul on the cross, so they were to win souls in their dungeon. Thank God! Paul and Silas knew what to say to the jailer. With one voice they shout: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." And they went right on and preached Jesus to the jailer and the whole company of officers and prisoners, and many gave their hearts to God and were happily converted, and were bap-

tized in the jail that night as followers of Christ Jesus.

But I want you to notice the wonderful effect of the conversion of the jailer on his character and conduct. When Paul and Silas were brought to the jail, bleeding and bruised and hungry, he offered them neither sympathy nor food nor ministry of any kind. He put them in the worst cell in the prison, and put their feet in the stocks, and went off to bed. But now that he has repented of his sins and God has forgiven him through Jesus Christ, see how differently he feels and acts.

He delays the baptism to minister to them. He asks them to wait until he goes and gets a pan of water and a towel and a bottle of oil. And I see him as, with tears running down his cheeks like rain, he washes the dirt of that dungeon cell from their poor bruised backs and pours on the healing oil and binds up their wounds and makes them as comfortable as he can, and then, after he has been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he takes Paul and Silas, not to the inner dungeon,—no, indeed, —he takes them up-stairs into the family rooms over the jail, and he hunts up the best food there is in the house, and gets up the best breakfast that jail has ever seen, and sets it before Paul and Silas. He will not let the servants serve them;

he serves them himself in humility and love, and urges them, with loving persistence, to partake of food.

There is nothing in this world that will so melt a hard heart and make it tender and loving as the forgiving mercy of Jesus. No wonder Luke tells us when writing the story that the jailer "rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God."

Thank God, the Christian religion is the religion of joy. If you will forsake your sins here and now you, too, shall lose your hardness of heart, your sorrow and your fear, and you will find a joy more wonderfully satisfying than you have ever known.

Come to Christ! Leave all your gloom and your fears at the feet of Jesus, and in His forgiving love find the fountain of joy that shall never cease to send forth streams of gladness and rejoicing.

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